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from the editor

Dear readers,

In Lithuania, March is a special month. As we all know, March 11th is our biggest holiday. It's the day that brought us independence in 1990. Thirty years have passed, and with each year it is harder to remember how miraculous that time was. Who would have thought that the dawn of independence will dawn upon us after fifty gloomy years of soviet occupation? But it did. Unexpectedly even for us who lived in Lithuania at the time. Perhaps, unexpectedly for American Lithuanians as well. Even though we have never lost hope and we always believed in it. It was still unexpected. It was nothing short of a miracle.

However, independence did not come from out of anywhere. It was always deep in our hearts, in the hearts of our parents and grandparents. It was deep within us like seeds waiting for the spring to sprout. And the spring came. It's hard to imagine the euphoria we were experiencing at that time.

Now, thirty years later, it almost seems like it was always there. A new generation has matured in those thirty years. A generation that had never lived under oppression. A generation that had never known what it means not to be able to do what one wants, to go where one wants. It is our duty and obligation to make sure that this new generation would never forget that independence is something that was not just handed to us. It is something that our fathers and forefathers fought for. We have a duty to never forget the sacrifices they made.

Let us enjoy and celebrate spring and freedom! And let us always remember how easy it is to lose independence and how hard it is to gain it back!

Karilė Vaitkutė
Editor

I Believe that Culture Works Wonders

Interview with Giedrė Elekšytė Knieža,
Chair of the Lithuanian American
Community Cultural Council



Giedrė Elekšytė Knieža. Photo by Sandra Ščedrina.

Arvydas Reneckis: It has been one year since you have been elected the Chair of the LAC Cultural Council. It must have been a busy year. Let's talk about the Council's plans for 2020. It looks like it will be a pretty active year.

Giedrė Elekšytė-Knieža: Yes, 2020 will be filled with activities. Before I start enumerating future events, I would like to say that the Cultural Council is not responsible for organizing events. I work with the 53 chapters of the Lithuanian Community, and it would not be possible for me to organize events for them all. In reality, the work of the President of the Cultural Council is to follow the annual guidelines drawn up by the LAC Council, to fill out applications, to receive financial support for events, to distribute that support, and to "get roasted" (laughs).

AR: In other words, are you get proposals for future events and try to get financial help for them?

GEK: Not too many proposals come from the LAC chapters. Everyone wants you to do everything for them - bring them shows, concerts, and programs. Mostly, private individuals bring artists from Lithuania to Chicago. Chicago is home to a very large number of Lithuanians,

and therefore this city is the most popular and financially stable in terms of events. After artists come to Chicago, the LAC Cultural Council can help them further with funding and enable them to perform in other cities and reach larger audiences.

AR: Does it mean that the most popular events were those in which performers from Lithuania participated?

GEK: Yes, and it's a big job to organize these events. Preparation can take half a year or a year because organizers have to obtain work visas for artists, to arrange all the documentation, to see to the technical side of shows, to take care of performers themselves.

AR: What were some of the most successful events of this type last year?

GEK: The Cultural Council helped organize a concert that was held during the LAC Council's annual session. The performers, Česlovas Gabalis and Tomas Varnagiris, came from Lithuania. After the concert in Chicago, they performed in other places where Lithuanians live, namely, Atlanta, California, and Minnesota. It was thanks to the

Cultural Council that Minnesota - a very small chapter - hosted such outstanding musicians. The Minnesota Lithuanians were very happy.

At the end of the year, we had a very successful concert called "Viva, Vivaldi!" held in Chicago. It was organized by Dainora Baliutavičienė, a member of Chicago's Marquette Park Chapter. She did all the work, and the LAC Cultural Council contributed financially to allow the artists to perform in several other US cities.

AR: What events are you looking forward to in 2020?

GEK: The biggest event of the year will be the dance festival in July in Philadelphia.

In the fall, we will host a play, "Kalės vaikai", directed by the late Eimuntas Nekrošius in the Klaipėda Drama Theater in Chicago. The play will be dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the restoration of Lithuania's independence. It will be a grandiose event, probably similar to last year's musical "The Legend of Žygimantas Augustas and Barbora Radvilaitė". There will be fewer performers than last year, 24 people. We are currently looking for a beautiful venue that would accommodate one thousand viewers. We would like to find a nice space where people would feel like they've come to a real theater and after the show, they would have a chance to talk to the actors over a cup of coffee or a glass of wine. We would also like to see to it that not only the Chicago Lithuanians are satisfied. We are asking if the actors who participate in Nekrošius's play have solo plays or smaller plays in which they participate. If they are, we would be able to arrange a tour during which they would show their solo performances in various LAC chapters.

Another big event organized by the Cultural Council will be a rock opera "Oath". It will be shown in February in Lemont High School Hall, as well as in Los Angeles.

We are also planning singer Gintarė Jautakaitė's concert tour in the United States. It remains to be seen how many LAC chapters the singer visits. There's got to be an interest shown by the chapters because, as you might understand, I'm not going to be able to drive the singer to or from an airport, to or from a concert hall, etc.

In the fall, the music group "Pelenai" will come from Lithuania. We will try to organize the group's concerts in various LAC locations around the US.

The annual Poetry Spring which is currently being



The cast of Šnekučiai musical. Photo by Sandra Ščedrina.

organized by Sandra Avižienytė will be sponsored by the LAC Cultural Council. We will help with the funding and try to send the Poetry Spring to travel across the US. Every year, the Poetry Spring publishes a book of poems by the authors participating in the event. These authors reside in different states, and it would be fun if this great event would travel to the cities where the participating poets live.

AR: The dance festival is the biggest event. Can you talk about it?

GEK: I think that the festival's art director, Gintaras Grinkevičius, would be able to tell you more about it. The LAC and the Folk Dance Institute appoint an art director, and he or she takes care of the creative side. The LAC is concerned with the administration and the funding.

We also have good news: in 2021, we will have a song festival. Song and dance festivals are hosted not only by the LAC but also by the Canadian Lithuanian Community, i.e. all of North America. On the one hand, this makes it easier to organize such events. On the other hand, it becomes more complex. By the way, I have to say that the quality level of these festivals has been rising lately. This is good news. I also have to say that the LAC Cultural Council is seeking greater cooperation with the Cultural Council of Lithuania in implementing large-scale projects.

AR: It is interesting because, most probably, in Lithuania, they think that American Lithuanians are drowning in money, and no additional funding is needed to maintain Lithuanian culture in the US.



Suktinis dance group and Chicago Lithuanian Runners Club participated in the Thanksgiving Parade. Photo by Sandra Ščedrina.

GEK: Yes, we should work together more. However, our cooperation today is only in the plans. By the way, it is very difficult to fill out Lithuanian applications because they are written in extremely complicated language. I was born and raised in Lithuania, I have a great command of my mother tongue, but I have a very hard time understanding those applications and sometimes I do not understand them at all.

AR: Is there any cooperation between the World Lithuanian Community and the LAC?

GEK: I have a lot of fantasies about our potential collaboration but my time as the head of the Cultural Council is very limited. My term is only for three years. Because my immediate job is to respond, request, and report, paperwork takes a lot of time, and there is very little time left to organize events.

AR: What is the LAC Cultural Council's main source of income?

GEK: We are funded by the Lithuanian Foundation. The Cultural Council fills out applications and submits them to the Lithuanian Foundation asking for money for various events. By the way, sometimes LAC chapters do not realize that the Cultural Council and the Lithuanian Foundation are two different organizations. The Cultural Council applies to the Lithuanian Foundation for support. Chapter Councils must contact the Cultural Council. As I mentioned before, there is a lot of paperwork. In

my opinion, a certain amount should be given for cultural events annually, and that amount should be used in the way that the Cultural Council sees it. Now the Cultural Council has to deal with the LAC chapters regarding every, even the smallest event, and that takes long hours. Unfortunately, the LAC does not have its own funds; we live out of the support of the Lithuanian Foundation.

AR: We talked about bringing in performers from Lithuania. What about local performers? Don't we have any? Is the quality of their performing not satisfactory?

GEK: I try to encourage local artists and cultural event organizers. The Lithuanian musical "Šnekučiai" was performed very successfully. Local

folk dance group "Suktinis", Chicago's Lithuanian Opera Choir and local singers performed in the musical alongside with the singers from Lithuania. We showed this musical to the Cleveland Lithuanians as well. As far as I know, it was the first traveling musical of such scale, with about fifty performers on stage.

We are also planning to bring a musical show for children called "Kakė Makė". It was staged last year by the Maironis Lithuanian School, and this year we want to bring this performance to various Lithuanian schools. Most importantly, students in each school will be able to participate. While the main actors will come from Chicago, all other actors in the performance will be local students.

A Los Angeles-based writer, Justina Brazdžionis, who has published an illustrated book for children in English and Lithuanian, "Noah and Amaday," will also be traveling around the area with her theatrical program. We want to involve children; otherwise, the Lithuanian spirit will evaporate quickly.

AR: What about theater festivals we used to have? Are they gone forever?

GEK: Theater festivals will resume. However, before I talk about that, I would like to explain that the LAC Council consists of 60 elected persons who convene once a year and decide what the LAC Board - 15 people - will have to work on during the entire year. It seems to me that the opposite should be true: 15 people should give work to 60 people. But it is as it is. The Council wanted

to discontinue the theater festival, and we want to revive it. The theater festival is difficult to maintain. I do not know what the reason for the festival's discontinuance was. Perhaps, the place was not good, or maybe the time was not good. My idea of a theater festival is arranging a workshop that would connect our theater groups and inspire them to work. We are working on this idea right now. We would like to invite one or more theatre professionals from Lithuania who would direct those workshops. The workshops could result in a performance that could travel throughout the LAC chapters.

AR: It seems to me that the festival discontinued because viewers couldn't see all the shows brought from all over the United States and Canada during one long weekend. Not many viewers could come to all performances. Maybe theatre groups should tour in different US cities?

GEK: That's why we want to organize workshops in different parts of the US. One year, the workshop could take place in New York, another year - in Los Angeles, and so on. Theater groups from all over the United States could attend such a workshop.

AR: For American Lithuanians who live in different parts of the US, it would also be interesting to meet and communicate.

GEK: Yes, these interactions are always a lot of fun.

AR: Are you making any contact points with Americans and other ethnic groups?

GEK: This year, the Cultural Council participated in the Thanksgiving Parade in Chicago. We plan to attend again next year. Anyone who has ideas can write to me at kultura@javlb.org. I invite everyone to contribute their suggestions.

Every year, the dance group "Suktinis" performs at the Christmas show held at the Science and Industry Museum in Chicago. The LAC Waukegan chapter participates in a huge annual exhibition in Wisconsin where we present Lithuanian culture. Perhaps we need to be more involved in presenting our culture to Americans but communication with Americans is also the work of Lithuanian consulates and cultural attachés. Our job is to preserve Lithuanian language and traditions within the Lithuanian community as is directed by the Lithuanian Charter written 70 years ago. Sometimes we have very nice joint projects as, for example, was last year's celebration of the 100th anniversary of Lithuania's independence.

The problem is lack of time. You sow the seeds and the fruits can be picked by others. For example, I would



Giedrė Elekšytė Knieža gives interview to the World Lithuanians TV program during the 3rd International Children's Dance Festival in Lemont, Illinois. Photo by Tadas Raudžius.

like to do a laser show on a Lithuanian topic on the Chicago Merchandise Mart building on the Chicago River. However, such a project requires a great deal of time and money.

The biggest project during my term will be the online LAC events calendar. The calendar will be organized by states and will make the planning work for the organizers easier. At the same time, the information will be received by all chapters and viewers. Many organizations or institutions have their websites. The problem is that we don't know them all. As a result, we do not know where to look for information about upcoming events. It is necessary to combine and unite all of this on one website. Partial funding has already been received, and we hope that the calendar of events will be implemented by spring. We will be creating new visuals for the LAC. We want the LAC, one of the largest Lithuanian organizations outside Lithuania, to be easily recognizable, accessible, and relevant to everyone.

AR: What motivates you to volunteer your time working for the Lithuanian American Community?

GEK: I believe that culture works wonders. This is the only reason I was persuaded to do this job. I don't like politics, voting, meetings, paperwork... it's frustrating. But I believe in culture. It brings people together. It connects and inspires people. Nothing will connect the Lithuanian chapters from all over the United States more than culture does. Of course, you could come together just to eat cepelinai or koldūnai. But in reality, it is cultural events that unite everyone. I believe in that. Maybe I am naive, but I believe it. I put on my pink glasses and believe that culture works wonders. This is the engine that runs me.



Society of Lithuanian Campanologists

By Dr. Gintautas Žalėnas
Translated by Vijolė Arbas

Dr. Gintautas Žalėnas examines old bells in Lithuania.

About Lithuania's bells

The bells of Lithuania have a long and complicated history. Quite many, very old and valuable bells have survived, despite their destruction by frequent fires and other natural disasters and thefts by victors of battles. The 600-year anniversary of the oldest bell in Lithuania falls in 2020. This is the only bell surviving since the times, when Lithuania was one of the largest states in all of Europe with a territory stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. This bell is not only the oldest in Lithuania but also among its neighboring countries—Latvia, Estonia and Belarus. This is also the year, when we will commemorate the bell with the oldest inscription in the Lithuanian language—it is 400 years old. Previously this bell had belonged to a church in Klaipėda for a parish of Lietuvininkai, as the Lithuanian population living in Lithuania Minor was known back then. After the World War II, the bell was stored for safekeeping in Pašilė, a small village of Samogitia (locally known as the Žemaitija ethnographic region.) These two bells were not imports. They had been bellfounded here, at a local Lithuanian foundry. Foundries had been operating in Vilnius, Kaunas, Varniai,

Nesvizh (now Belarus) and other towns in the Lithuanian state of old. These foundries had cast hundreds of valuable, artistic bells, some of which continue to chime in our days.

Comparatively many of the bells still surviving in Lithuania had been cast in Königsberg in the former East Prussia. This had been one of the most important and significant locales for casting bells along the entire Baltic seacoast. The misfortune of World War II swept Königsberg practically off the face of the earth. Meanwhile, the bells remaining in the part of East Prussia that had fallen to Russia were either demolished or stolen by the conquering newcomers. Thus, these days, the bells cast by Königsberg master craftsmen, which still survive in Lithuania to this day, represent a unique part of a cultural heritage significant for all of Europe.

Lithuania has been a site consisting of various crossroads since ancient times. It would not be easy to find another country in Europe containing bells manufactured in so many different places. Adding to the aforementioned instruments cast in Lithuania and Königsberg (currently Kaliningrad), there are many bells that

had originated in Poland and in current-day Latvia, primarily in Riga and Curland (aka Curonia). Quite a few old Russian bells can be discovered as well. It is good to remember that most of the bells in Russia Proper had been demolished during the times of communist rule. There are also a good number of bells in Lithuania cast by different German foundries in Lübeck, Apolda and Bochum. However, a bell that calls for special mention is one cast between the 16th to 18th century in Danzig (currently Gdańsk) — the city that had been the grandest center of bell-making in all of Europe. Furthermore, also worthy of special mention, there are the bells that came into Lithuania after World War I from the area that is currently Western Ukraine. Such a variety of bells makes the work of research quite difficult. On the other hand, this work is far more interesting, because it requires taking an interest in the bells from neighboring countries and from lands even farther away, rather than concentrating merely on the bells of one's own country. A study is especially challenging when it involves bells that very few others had written about or ever had little interest.

Any discussion about Lithuania's bells cannot be complete without mentioning the long-lasting tradition of carillon music. The carillon — this is probably the largest, heaviest and most valuable musical instrument ever created by man. It consists of no fewer than 23 bells, which frequently weigh ten or more tons. The first carillon of Lithuania was known as *Kovų varpai*, i.e., 'Bells of Battles'. It was cast in 1935 in Belgium. Its designation was the bell tower of the War Museum in Kaunas. The music drifting from the tower of this museum were performances by carillonners Viktoras and his son Giedrius Kuprevičius. It was one of a kind in all of Eastern Europe. Now Lithuania has as many as five sets of bells of carillon size—this number surpasses those in Russia, Poland and Ukraine, not to mention Latvia, Estonia or Belarus, where not a single such instrument exists.

A relic of the first Republic of Lithuania has tremendous symbolic significance for the Lithuanian nation — the Freedom Bell, a symbol of Lithuania's Independence. North American Lithuanians had it cast in 1919. It was of great service in raising funds in the United States for battling numerous enemies and reestablishing the Lithuanian State. This bell hangs proudly from the bell tower of the War Museum in Kaunas to the present day.



Examining old bells in Lithuania.



Bell examinations require good acrobatic skills.

About the Society of Lithuanian Campanologists Campanology is a rarely used word. It references the science about bells and everything related to them. Therefore campanologists can be not only scholars but also people who engage in the upkeep of bells or, simply, people for whom bells are a hobby. *Societas campanarum*



The Society of Lithuanian Campanologists founding meeting.

Lituaniae or the ‘Society of Lithuanian Campanologists’ unify people with an interest in bells, those who study them, play them, repair them and maintain them. Society members include members of foundations who donate their private funds for acquiring new bells or repairing old ones. Members can even include those who simply like the sound of chimes ringing. Such a society is the only one of its kind in the entire region, not only in just Lithuania. No similar organization exists, not in Latvia or Estonia nor in Poland, Belarus or Ukraine. However, similar societies operate in the Scandinavian countries, Germany, France and other Western European countries as well as in Russia. The establishment of Lithuania’s society was on February 13, 2017.



Members of the Society of Lithuanian Campanologists meet in Vilnius.

The Society does not have a large membership, consisting of only 16 enthusiasts who have differing levels of education and engage in different professions. There are three PhDs and several historians. They include some businesspeople, engineers and physics.

One member is Liudmila Felčinskaja, an excellent photographer, who lives in Elektrėnai Town but descended from a distinguished family that has engaged in casting bells for over 200 years, from the times the first bell foundry established in present-day Western Ukraine (currently her relatives own three bell foundries in Poland). Another active member is translator Vijoļė Arbas, one of the few American-Lithuanians (with a master’s degree), who moved to Lithuania right after independence to live and work in Kaunas. Another avid contributor to the society is well-known ethnographer and campanologist, Professor Libertas Klimka. Another member is Renatas Dūda, a finance manager working for a large company in Kaunas. One of his great accomplishments—he has singularly, with no assistance or funding, managed to drive through and photograph all the bells found at Lithuania’s Roman Catholic dioceses, three of them, often risking life and limb (there are seven dioceses in Lithuania). He has compiled all his documentations of bells into a book that is in progress for publication. Then there is Arvydas Karaška, a musicologist and collector, who has exhibited his collection of various bells, one of the first such exhibitions in Lithuania. One member, engineer Saulius Stulpinas, is our professional “bell doctor”. He is capable of installing and repairing bells and their fasteners. Chairman of the Society’s Board, Dr. Gintautas Žalėnas, has not only written the first book on bells in Lithuanian but

he has also authored the first dissertation on bells in Lithuania.

Members of the Society are located nearly all over Lithuania. They not only reside in Vilnius or Kaunas but also in Rokiškis, Alytus, Pasvalys, Elektrėnai and Vepriai. Vepriai is a charming little town, which is home to our eldest member, Romas Šaulys, born while in exile, in Siberia. He contributed his efforts and his own money to cast as many as four bells for the town's local Vepriai Church. Meanwhile he is gathering contributions for reconstructing the church tower, which a German bombing had destroyed during World War II. What makes this society exceptional from other, similar organizations in Lithuania is the location of its headquar-

ters—it is not in one of the largest cities, like Vilnius or Kaunas, but in Rokiškis, which is near the Latvian border. This city is also home to the Society's President, Leonardas Šablinskas, who was instrumental in having the nearly 200-year old bell of Rokiškis Church renovated. This project was accomplished with the help of other Society members from Rokiškis several years ago. He also found financial support for casting two more bells for this church. The blessing of the bells took place on December 8, 2019. It is noteworthy that these bells were cast at the papal Pontificia Fonderia Marinelli foundry, one of the oldest in world still operating today. It opened approximately in the year 1040, nearly a thousand years ago!

Difficulties remain hidden in heaven

A well-known riddle in Lithuania — “Everyone hears it; but, few have ever seen it. What is it?” Naturally that's a bell. What's true is that bells are hung high in bell towers that are difficult to access. There they hide numerous problems that people standing on the ground and merely listening to their chimes never think about. So, people who were interested in bells would get together and talk over various problems. Back in 2015, an idea came up to establish a society. It took several more years before a group of like-minded people formed as a result of those private discussions. That was the nucleus for the future society. It was not easy to bring together people living in different places to work together in common. Our neighbor Poland provides an illustration of this difficulty. It is ten times larger than Lithuania and it is home to numerous experts interested in bells who live all over the country. The result is that no similar, national society has ever formed in the country.



Members of the Society of Lithuanian Campanologists live in different towns of Lithuania. They come together for meetings in Vilnius.

Life itself along with practical goals dictated the necessity of having an established society. Lithuania suffered the destruction of its largest and most valuable bells during the 20th century. The conditions of the surviving bells are far from good and simply unsatisfactory. The occupation by Soviet Russia froze Lithuania for fifty years, as if it were under ice. All that time, churches had nowhere to acquire bells, since their manufacture was prohibited in the atheistic Soviet Union, and imports from elsewhere were impossible. No literature or instructions about the maintenance or proper use of bells were in accessible existence. Therefore bells were not kept up during all those years. A few enthusiasts were responsible for inventorying about half of all Lithuania's bells back in Soviet times and, partly, during Independent Lithuania. Unfortunately, once they stopped working, all the work practically came to a halt. Upon Lithuania's independence, not only did the first new bells arrive on the scene, but new problems came up as well. Thefts of bells began, both for their metal and for their historical value. Unfortunately, the old bells are still not properly maintained and safeguarded.

Soon enough the people interested in bells realized that the personnel working at Lithuania's State institutions involved in cultural heritage is not resolving the issue of proper maintenance of historical bells. Furthermore, it seems, these institutions are unable to do so, because there wasn't a single expert delegated to do this job. Thereby the partially accomplished inventory of bells remains incomplete to this day. Furthermore the chime of nary a single historical bell has been recorded; there is still no database of Lithuania's historical bells, and the conditions of even the most valuable instruments are not



One of the most esteemed Lithuanian ethnologists, Dr. Libertas Klimka, is a member of the Society of Lithuanian Campanologists.

being monitored. There is also no register of bells that had been hidden during the war, that had disappeared or that had been stolen, some of which had been taken to foreign lands. So, it is no surprise that, although the State has been generously financing other projects pertinent to the maintenance and revival of Lithuania's cultural heritage, it has not delegated a single ruble, litas or euro for the upkeep, security and restoration of historical bells since Soviet times. The Campanology Society has begun publicizing all such problems and ringing the bell of danger, which is still, alas, insufficiently heard.

One important area of work is the dissemination of information about Lithuania's bells to familiarize the public with historical bells and their histories. The newly-formed Society raised an ambitious idea for commemorating the 100-year anniversary of Lithuania as a modern state. It spent its misery financial resources to prepare a project for the first exhibition of Lithuania's bells. Although such an exhibition might still be arranged in the future, 100 churches across the country did toll their bells to mark a century of our state's existence. This year the Society approached the Seimas parliamentary body of the Republic of Lithuania with a request to declare 2020 the symbolic year of bells. It also approached the newly-elected President of the Republic of Lithuania with a request to initiate issuance of commemorative coins or stamps to immortalize the anniversaries of the aforementioned bells. The latest idea is to compile a catalogue of Lithuania's historically most important bells, not only within the borders of present-day Lithuania but also in Poland, Belarus, Latvia and Ukraine as well as, even, in the United States. However, the fate of these and other ideas

will depend on the generosity and support of patrons. A contribution by American-Lithuanians might also prove weighty. Obviously the Society's members who reside in Lithuania may not be physically capable of sightseeing all the church towers of American-Lithuanian churches of old just to check out the bells hanging there. Undoubtedly such valuable bells exist, as shown by the bell cast in 1907 for Chicago's parish of Our Lady of Vilna Church, containing a lengthy, Lithuanian engraving. The American-Lithuanian press has issued its history not long ago.

Work, holidays, entertainment and anniversaries

Although the Society has only been in existence a very short time, a good

deal has already been accomplished academically. A group of members participated in three conferences held in Poland on the histories of bells and issues regarding their security. Several trips around Lithuania have been arranged for examining ancient, historical bells. There are also several, previously unknown, impressive discoveries. A bell cast in 1578 was found in Samogitia [Žemaitija] during an excursion organized in the fall of 2019. It has been identified as the oldest bell in the entire area. The most important findings were in 2017. Meanwhile, not far from Vilnius, a bell was cast in 1542 at the oldest, royal, canon-making foundry in Pabaiskas Town. This bell, containing a Latin engraving in Gothic lettering, weighs nearly a ton. In Ramygala Town, there was an even more important discovery. A huge bell was found in the bell tower of this town's church weighing over two tons, which Prussia's most famous bellmaker, Henrick van Swichelt, had cast in 1522. This bell is meaningful to the entire southeastern Baltic region. It is the oldest surviving Renaissance bell in any country of this region and the only one safeguarded in Lithuania that could be considered a monument of importance to all of Europe. The 14th generation of this master's descendents, now living in Berlin, visited this bell in 2018.

The Society tries to repay a societal debt of inadequate attention, not only to historical bells but also to living people who deserve respect for their work investigating bells or creating music with bells. An honorary membership in the Society of Lithuanian Campanologists was awarded to Dr. Marija Gražina Martinaitienė in 2017. She published a book about the most famous bellmaker in Lithuania, Jean Breutel, descended from Lorraine



Romas Šaulys contributed his efforts and his own money to cast as many as four bells for the Vepriai Church.

(a site presently in France, though formerly part of the Grand Duchy), who was the only person in Lithuania to be granted a title of Royal Bellfounder. In 2018 honorary memberships were also bestowed to a famous campanologist in Poland, Professor Krzysztof Maciej Kowalski of Gdańsk University, and to an outstanding French carillonneur, Jean-Bernard Lemoine.

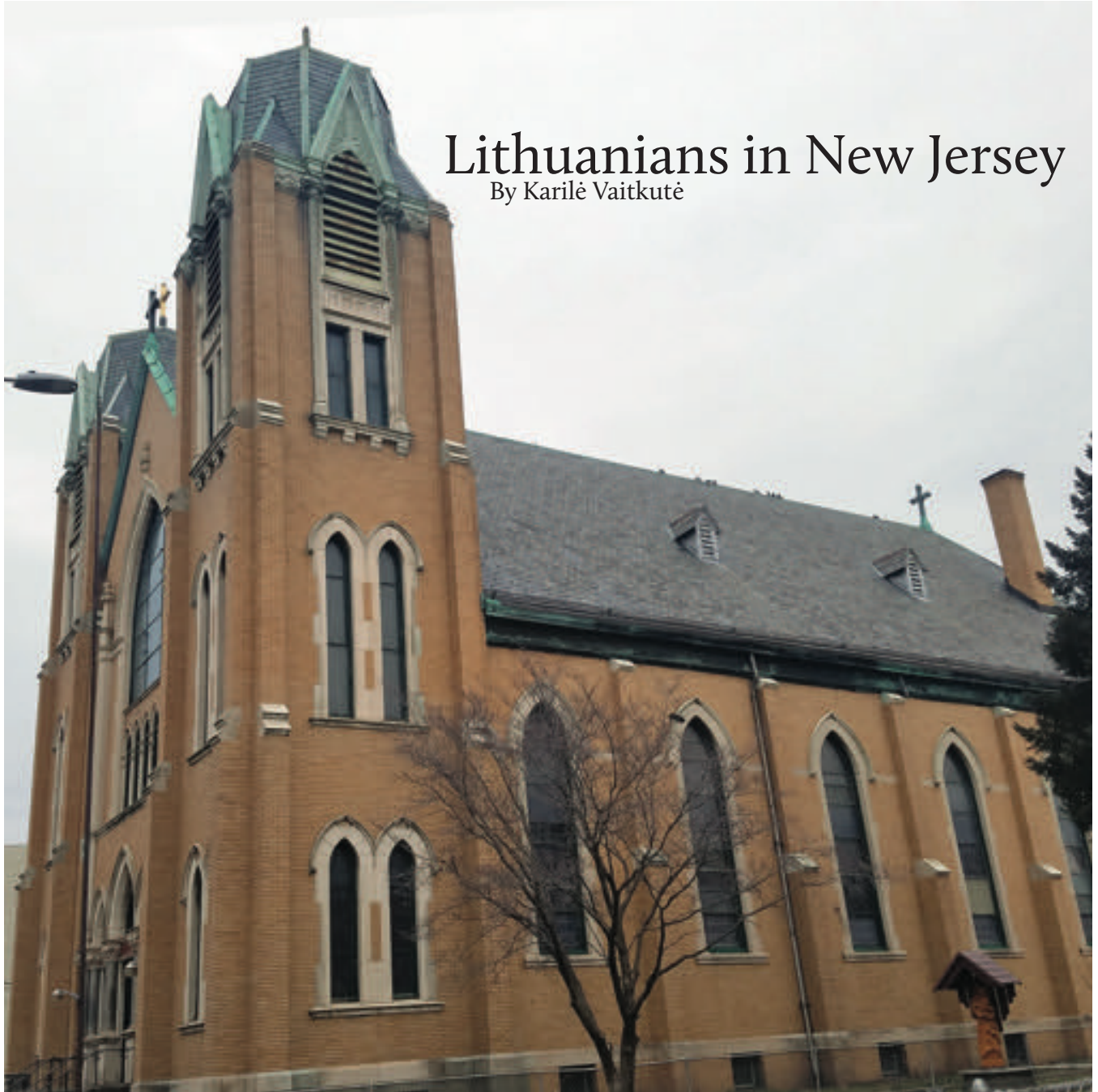
Nonetheless the Society's members are not only scholars and its activities are not limited to the knowledge of history. Concerts frequently resound with the music of bells for their enthusiasts. Our own Society's members, Austėja Staniunaitytė-Proietta and Raimundas Eimontas are outstanding carillonneurs, who participate enthusiastically. A handy instrument for such shows is an electronic carillon, constructed by another Society's member, engineer Saulius Stulpinas. It may well have been a first in the world, when a mobile carillon and vibraphone concert played in the Grand Hall of the Rokiškis Manor in February of 2018. The audience enjoyed performers Raimundas Eimontas and Marius Šinkūnas with great enthusiasm. Another concert was held in Taninges, France in honor of Lithuania's 100-year anniversary was organized by our member Jean-Bernard Lemoine and performed by our member Raimundas Eimontas. A small entourage of our

members accompanied with an exhibit of Lithuania's Freedom Bell. The national anthems of both countries rang from the bell tower, and the melodies Raimundas performed were a hit with the French public in attendance. Reports about the concert appeared in the local press and abroad.

Sightseeing is also an important engagement of the Society. On the way to visit historical bells, our members visit interesting sites, thus, combining tourism with relaxation and entertainment. A visit during one such trip included Latgala, now part of Latvia, though once under Lithuanian jurisdiction. To our great surprise, we discovered bells with Lithuanian engravings in Indrica Village, far from the current borders of Lithuania. Then, in 2017, a trip to Torun, Poland included hearing the oldest bell from the Middle Ages in the country reverberate—the Tuba Dei 'God's Trumpet' in Latin, weighing 7500 kg resounds only a few times per year. A commemoration of the 400-year jubilee of the oldest bell in Kaunas, in 2018, prompted a visit to its birthplace — Gdańsk City in Poland. Sites visited along the way were different castles, churches and other points of interest. It left every traveler with a multitude of great memories.

Lithuanians in New Jersey

By Karilė Vaitkutė



Sts. Peter and Paul Lithuanian Church in Elizabeth, New Jersey in 2020. The church was built in 1910. Photo by Rita Janz.

The beginnings of the Lithuanian American Community in New Jersey

If we look at the census records of 1900, 1910, and 1920, we will see that many residents of various cities in New Jersey, especially Elizabeth, Newark, Bayonne, were of Lithuanian descent. Some were born in Lithuania, others were born in New Jersey but their parents immigrated from Lithuania. In his book, *Lithuanian Religious Life in America*, William Volkovich-Valkavičius writes that

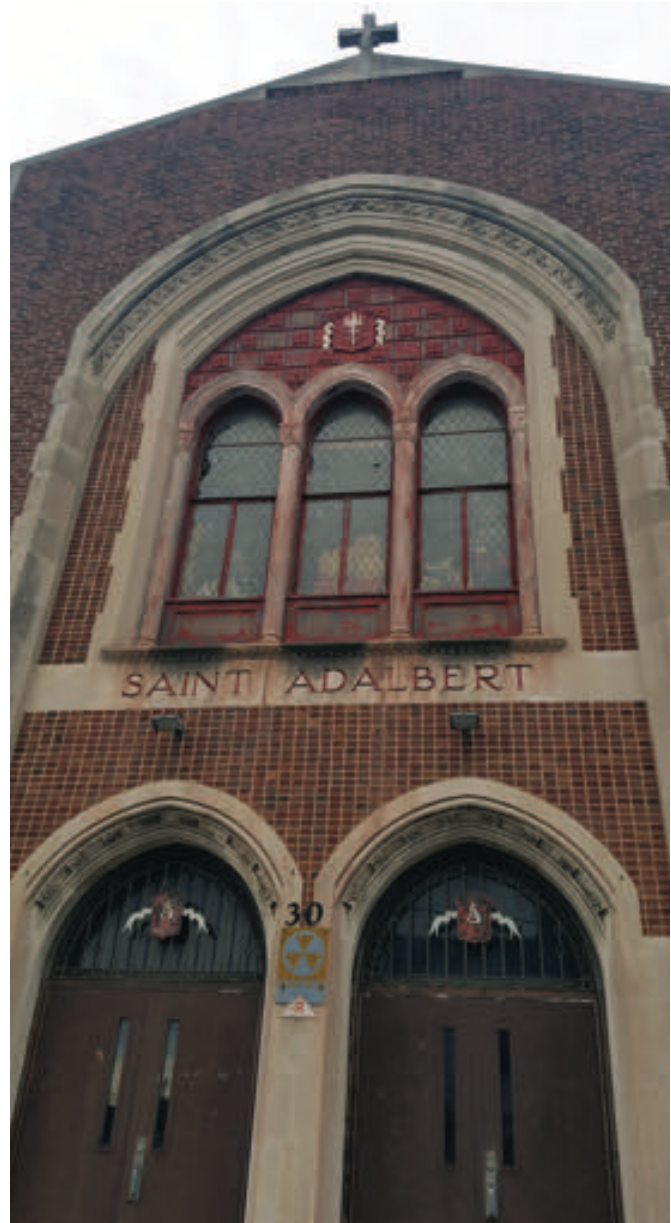
Lithuanians settled in Elizabeth, New Jersey as early as 1878. They were drawn to this and surrounding towns by the possibility to find jobs in many local factories. At first, many of those Lithuanians attended Mass and religious services at St. Patrick's Church in Elizabeth. However, as the Lithuanian population kept increasing, a need for forming a Lithuanian organization appeared. In the spring of 1892, the first Lithuanian benevolent association, St. Casimir's Society, was established. Shortly after-



The doors of Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Elizabeth, New Jersey. The church was built in 1910. Above the left door, the Gediminas Pillars (Gedimino stulpai) are still visible. Above the central door, the name of the church is inscribed, indicating that this is a Lithuanian Roman Catholic church, and above the right door, a stylized Vytis, coat of arms of Lithuania is depicted. The mass schedule indicates that Lithuanian/English Mass is held on Sundays at 10:30 a.m. Photo by Rita Janz.

ward, another was formed with St. George as its patron.

This banding together strengthened the Lithuanians' desire to have their own parish. The following year, Rev. Joseph Zebrys visited the growing Lithuanian colony in Elizabeth. Knowing of their aspirations to have a parish of their own, he suggested they hold a meeting, going house to house, inviting the people to discuss the requirements of establishing a parish. On September 4, 1893, such a meeting took place, and a special Board was



Saint Adalbert parish hall in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Saint Adalbert parish now has two churches: St. Adalbert and Sts. Peter and Paul. It is now connected with Sts. Peter and Paul. Lithuanian Independence celebration took place in the St. Adalbert parish hall. Photo by Rita Janz.

formed for this purpose. On October 7, 1894, a new Board was elected. As soon as the "New Parish Fund" reached \$1,200.00, members of the Board were delegated to purchase a plot of land on Ripley Place for the construction of a church.

On October 6, 1895, the cornerstone of the church of Sts. Peter & Paul (presently the parish hall) was placed. Sts. Peter & Paul, the first Lithuanian Roman Catholic church in the state of New Jersey was completed and ready by

TWELFTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES.

SCHEDULE No. 1.—POPULATION.

State New Jersey
County Union

Township or other division of county _____

1st District

Name of Institution, _____

Name of incorporated city, town, or village, within the above-named division, _____

Elizabeth

Enumerated by me on the 12 day of June, 1900, _____

John R. Davis

A partial image of 1900 census sheet from Elizabeth, NJ. Among the questions of 1900 census, the following questions were asked What was the person's place of birth, what was the person's father's and mother's place of birth, what year did the person immigrate to the United States, how many years has the person been in the United States and is the person naturalized. We can see that residents of Elizabeth, NJ indicate that their place of birth was "Lithuania Russia". In 1900 Lithuania was still not free from Russia, it did not exist as an independent state, and its residents had to state that they were born in Russia. The image is taken from www.ancestry.com.

A partial image of the 1920 census sheet from Elizabeth, NJ. In 1920, the US residents born in Lithuania could already indicate their country of birth as Lithuania and not Russia. Lithuania gained its independence in 1918 and Lithuanian Americans, even though born prior to 1918, were reporting Lithuania as their place of birth. The image is taken from www.ancestry.com.

New Year's Day, 1896.

The Lithuanian emigration to Newark increased so rapidly, that in 1902, Rev. Zindzius was able to organize a separate parish on Adams Street, Newark (Holy Trinity). Fr. Zindzius' zealous efforts helped organize Lithuanian parishes in Bayonne and Jersey City in 1908, and Patterson in 1912. The Elizabeth Lithuanian parish was mother to all the Lithuanian parishes in New Jersey with the exception of Harrison.

More and more Lithuanians settled in Elizabeth and Sts. Peter & Paul Church was becoming too small. On Novem-

ber 4, 1907, Bishop O'Connor encouraged Fr. Zindzius and the Board to build a new church. Soon after, 10 lots of land were purchased on Ripley Place and in 1910, a new brick church, in Gothic style, 60 by 137 feet and 60 feet high, seating 1,000 was built and stands today.

These were the beginnings of the Lithuanian community in New Jersey. According to 1920, 1930, 1940 censuses, the number of residents of New Jersey who were recorded as born in Lithuania was between 7,000 and 10,000. If we were to keep in mind that many of these Lithuanians had children who were already born in the

ELIZABETH, N. J.

Aukos Lietuvai nuo Elizabetho, N. J., Lietuvių:

Spalio 22 d., 1920 m., \$790.45
(S. Mack, Liet. R. Kryž. čekis 500 auks.).

Spalio 30 d., 1920 m., \$1,823.05 (S. Mack, Liet. Raud. Kryžiui šekis 2000 auks.).

Lapkričio 8 d., 1920 m., \$509.20.

Lapkričio 22 d., 1920 m., \$72.00.

Viso pinigais \$3,194.70.

Čekiais 2,500 auks.

Aukos padalinta sekančiai:
Lietuvos Raud. Kryžiui čekis 2,500 auksinų.

Lietuvos Raud. Kryžiui pinigais \$201.80.

Lietuvos Našlaičių (vaikų) Šelpimo draugijai Kaune \$102.00.

Lietuvos Gynimo Komitetui \$2,890.90.

Visos aukos pasiųstos Lietuvos Misijai sulig augščiau paminėto padalinimo.

Lietuvos Laisvės Išgavimo Komitetas:

F. Savickas, pirm.,

D. Petručionis, sekr.

A clipping from Draugas newspaper. On October 22, 1920, Draugas reported that Lithuanians in Elizabeth, NJ collected \$3,194.70 in cash and \$2,500 in checks to be sent to the Lithuanian Red Cross, Lithuanian Orphan's Aid Society in Kaunas and the Lithuanian Defense Committee. This attests to the strength of the Lithuanian community in Elizabeth, NJ. The equivalent of \$5,694.70 in 1920 is equal to \$77,428.03 in 2020. The image is taken from Draugas, October 22, 1920.

BE IT RESOLVED that it is the earnest desire of one hundred thousand Lithuanians in the state of New Jersey that the government of the U. S. accord Lithuania complete, and official recognition that it is independent and sovereign state whose government and officials are lawfully functioning and are entitled to diplomatic, commercial, financial and other relations with the United States and the other civilized nations of the world.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of these resolutions be sent to the President of the United States and the Secretary of State/

Pres. Walter A. Grogynskis
Sec. P. Glenskyte

A partial image of the resolution of Lithuanians in New Jersey asking that the United States government would recognize Lithuania as an independent state.



Lithuanians of the first wave of immigration worked in coal mines of Pennsylvania, in factories of New Jersey, in stockyards of Chicago. In this photo, we see Lithuanian miners. From the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture Photo Archive.



A badge of St. Casimir's Society founded in 1899 in Amsterdam (New York), NY. St. Casimir's society was also founded in Elizabeth, New Jersey in 1892.



Lithuania's Acting Consul General in New York, Gitana Skripkaitė, presents Dr. Rozalija Šomkaitė with the medal "For the Merits of the World Lithuanians to Lithuania". Photo by Rita Janz.



In 2019, 24 persons were awarded the medal "For the Merits of the World Lithuanians to Lithuania".

US, the number would be three or four times higher as families as that time used to be big.

Celebration of Lithuanian Independence Day in Elizabeth, New Jersey

Today Lithuanians still live in New Jersey. The Lithuanian American Community with its Northern New Jersey and Central New Jersey chapters is one of the strongest organizations today. Even though in 2005, a Polish priest was appointed Pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul Church, Lithuanian Mass is still being held on Sundays, and the Lithu-



Lithuania's Acting Consul General in New York, Gitana Skripkaitė.
Photo by Rita Janz.

anian community of New Jersey still comes together for various celebrations.

On February 16, 2020, the Celebration of the Independence Day of

Lithuania was commemorated in Elizabeth, NJ. Gitana Skripkaitė, Acting Consul General of the Republic of Lithuania in New York attended the celebration and extended her congratulations to the community. One of the key moments of the celebration was the presentation of the medal "For the Merits of the World Lithuanians to Lithuania" to Dr. Rozalija Šomkaitė. The medal was established



From left: The Lithuanian American Community Northern New Jersey Chapter President Saulius Galavackas, the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture Executive Director Rita Janz, and Dr. Vincas Kudirka Lithuanian School Principal Aušra Covalesky.

by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania in 2019. So far, 24 persons were awarded this medal. Dr. Rozalija Šomkaitė celebrated her 95th birthday on February 10, 2020. She immigrated to the United States as a young person after World War Two. After graduating from St. John's University with a Bachelor's degree, the University of Wisconsin with a Master's degree and Rutgers University with a Ph.D. in pharmacy, she worked at Warner-Lambert and later, Ethicon Medical Research Institute. Dr. Rozalija Šomkaitė has pioneered the Lithuanian Educational Assistance Relief Association with the



Members of the Lithuanian folk dance groups, Varpelis, Vėjas, and Liepsna.

mission of assisting the least fortunate in Lithuania.

During the celebration, participants enjoyed a presentation made by Rita Janz, the Executive Director of the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture. Ms. Janz came from Chicago and talked about the history of Lithuanian immigration to the United States, Lithuanian American communities in various states, and their role in supporting Lithuania's independence in 1918. Ms. Janz showed excerpts from the Balzekas Museum exhibit "For Freedom: The Contribution of US Lithuanians to the Restoration of Lithuanian Independence and Its Recognition." The exhibit is open at the Balzekas Museum in Chicago. Its traveling version is available to be shown at any location, and all there is to do is to inquire Rita Janz about how to do it. The Balzekas Museum director emphasized the importance of collecting historic artifacts. The Museum is collecting photographs and other artifacts pertaining to the early immigration of Lithuanians. If you have pho-

tos depicting the life and work conditions of Lithuanians in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and other states, please share them with the Museum. You can donate the originals to the Museum or you can donate digital copies of photographs you have in your family. Your donations would contribute to preserving the heritage and history of Lithuanian Americans. If you would like to reach the Balzekas Museum, please either write at info@balzekas-museum.org or call at 773-582-6500.

Lithuanian folk dance groups, Varpelis, Vėjas, and Liepsna, performed at the celebration of Lithuania's independence. The community is thankful to the Lithuanian American Community Northern New Jersey Chapter Chairman Saulius Galavackas and the entire Board, the Principal of Dr. Vincas Kudirka Lithuanian School, Aušra Covalesky, and all the dancers, singers, chefs, and organizers.

Shrove Tuesday Celebration and Spring Fair at the Chicago Lithuanian Youth Center

By Viktorija Šileika

Even though the winter in Chicago was very mild this year, the students of the Chicago Lithuanian School had to continue the tradition of Shrove Tuesday (Užgavėnės) during which the winter is chased away and the coming spring is celebrated. The Užgavėnės celebration took place at the Lithuanian Youth Center. A spring fair was held during which Lithuanian school students had a chance to sell their baked goods and handicrafts.

All photos by Viktorija Šileika.



Legendary Vairas at the Chicago Saturday School Fundraiser

By Viktorija Šileika



Vairas music band. From left: Darius Vaitoška (bass), Audrius Jonaitis (keyboards and saxophone), Vytautas Mundinas (drums), Rolandas Janušas (vocals, guitar). Photo by Viktorija Šileika.

On February 21, 2020, nostalgic sounds shook the Great Hall of the Chicago Lithuanian Youth Center. The annual fundraiser organized by the Chicago Lithuanian School attracted not only school supporters but also the fans of Vairas, a music group that made Šiauliai known throughout Lithuania. The fans remembered the concerts held during hot summers in Palanga, annual music festivals in Nida, and the thunderous resurrection of the band in 2000 when it released its latest album "Kings without Crowns" with which it toured all over Lithuania.

The band members left a bit of their hearts in Chicago. The audience sang and danced to every song, communicated with the musicians, and took pictures. Vairas members congratulated Chicago Lithuanian School on its 29th anniversary. Ieva Dilytė, a representative of the Consulate General of the Republic of Lithuania in Chicago, also congratulated the Chicago Lithuanian School on its 29th anniversary.



Ieva Dilytė, a representative of the Consulate General of the Republic of Lithuania in Chicago, congratulated the Chicago Lithuanian School on its 29th anniversary. Photo by Viktorija Šileika.



Vida Rupšienė, the principal of the Chicago Lithuanian Saturday School. Photo by Viktorija Šileika.



Chicago Lithuanian School's fundraiser at the Lithuanian Youth Center. Photo by Viktorija Šileika.

Children of the World Dance Festival

By Karilė Vaitkutė



Participants of the fourth annual children's folk dance festival "Children of the World". Photo by Tadas Raudžius.

On February 9th, the fourth annual children's folk dance festival "Children of the World" took place in the Lithuanian World Center in Lemont, Illinois. This year, the participants were the Švyturys children's folk dance group from Cleveland, Ohio, Pope John Paul II Polish School student dancers, Scottish children's dance group, and three Lithuanian children's dance groups from Lemont: Spindulys, Grandis, and Suktinis. The event was hosted by a well-known singer Agnė Giedraitytė and sponsored by the Lithuanian American Community Cultural Council and the Lithuanian Foundation. Festival organizers hope that the next year even more different ethnic group dancers will participate and the festival will grow. It is a good opportunity for our smallest to show their dancing skills and to enjoy each other, comparing dance moves and national costumes with other ethnicities



Agnė Giedraitytė with Scottish dancers.



The Lithuanian American Community Cultural Council Chair Giedrė Elekšytė Knieža and Agnė Giedraitytė. Photo by Tadas Raudžius.

our community

One Nation – One Family



Poetry recited by students and teacher Gabrielė Tymarskis. Photo by Vesta Steponavičiūtė

This slogan has become a favorite of the Waukegan – Lake County Lithuanian Community, and it has proven to be correct for more than once. From the early morning of February 15, 2020, the Lithuanian language could be heard at the Santa Maria del Popolo Parish Center in the Village of Mundelein, in the northeast area of Illinois. Members of the Lake County Lithuanian community were preparing to commemorate the 102nd anniversary of the Republic of Lithuania's Declaration of Independence. The center was being decorated, tables arranged for the celebration. In the back of the stage, the participants of the artistic part of the program were rehearsing.

The gathering attendees were greeted by long-standing members of the Chapter's Board of Directors, Elena Skališienė and Palmira Janušonienė. They welcomed the attendees, briefly introduced the structure of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc., and collected contributions and membership dues. There was a selection of informational posters displayed on the reception table.

The Commemoration began with the entry of members of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union in Exile as well as a formidable group of folk dancers dressed in national cos-

tumes, bringing in the flags of the U.S.A. and Lithuania. The singing of the National Anthems in both languages proceeded.

The Commemoration participants were greeted by the Waukegan – Lake County Lithuanian Community Board President, Gintautas Steponavičius, the Gediminas Lithuanian Cultural School principal, Lauryna Curl, the Nauja Karta (New Generation) Lithuanian Cultural School principal Kristina Puotkalytė-Gurgel, and Fr. Gediminas Keršys, who presented the invocation, asking the Almighty God to protect Lithuania as well as Lithuanians scattered in all parts of the world. Violeta Rutkauskienė emphasized the importance of the payment of dues which contributes towards the support and upkeep of the cultural goals of American Lithuanians.

The artistic part of the commemorative program was provided by Rusnė and Laumė folk dance groups. The attendees also heard young students of the Gediminas Lithuanian Cultural School recite poetry about Lithuania. Poet Donio Remio's verses were read by teacher Gabrielė Tymarskis.

It was not the first time that students of the Nauja Karta



Rusnė and Laumė folk dance groups. Photo by Vesta Steponavičiūtė.



Lithuanian American Community Waukegan-Lake County Chapter Board of Directors. Photo by Vidas Kazlauskas

(New Generation) Lithuanian Cultural School in Milwaukee commemorated this occasion. Not only the students but teachers and parents came as well. At the end of the program, everyone, the young and the old participated in the singing of the song "In the Land of Lithuania, Oak Trees Will Keep Growing" (Žemėj Lietuvos ažuolai žaliuos)

What would a celebration be without a feast? Hard-working and tireless community members, Žaneta,

Ramutė, Vesta, Violeta, and Renata decorated the tables with a variety of snacks. Thanks to the Waukegan – Lake County Board of Directors, everyone was welcomed to partake. For quite a while, no-one desired to make an early exit. New friendships were formed and the old ones were strengthened.

For the sake of everything Lithuanian – let unity blossom!!!

our community

The Second Film Night at the Colorado Lithuanian School

By Simona Bataitytė

On February 1, 2020, the Colorado Lithuanian School invited viewers to its second Lithuanian Film Night. This time, we watched Rimvydas Čekavičius's documentary, "Arvydas Sabonis 11. A Head Taller". Viewers had the opportunity to get to know the Lithuanian basketball legend more closely. In addition to the player's daily sports life, his family relationships were shown, and this made the film appealing not only to sports fans.

The children had the opportunity to spend time in the children's room while their parents watched the movie. We are delighted that people came to this community event, and after the movie was over, no one was in a hurry to leave, everyone enjoyed conversations over refreshments.

Our special thanks go to the sponsors of this event: the Colorado Lithuanian Community and the Lithuanian Foundation. All proceeds will be used to support the Colorado Lithuanian School. We hope that our future Film Nights will be well attended.



National Costumes for the Colorado Lithuanian School Students

By Simona Bataitytė

It took almost a year until the Lithuanian national costumes reached Colorado, and when finally they were in the hands of the Colorado Lithuanian School students, we were overjoyed. Last year, we received funding from the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania for the project "Ethno-Cultural Education Program for the Colorado Lithuanian School" which enabled us to find a tailor in Lithuania, Vilius Paškevičius, and commission him to make national costumes of different regions of Lithuania.

In the middle of February, the costumes finally arrived. Students were eager to try them on. Girls swirled in colorful skirts, boys tried to put on their vests, and it was a real proof of how important it is for a person to experience Lithuanian culture not only from books but by touching it directly.

Students can't wait to put on the newly-sewn national costumes for the Independence Commemoration in Colorado. We hope to wear them on all occasions and to



It is important to feel good in one's national costume.

enjoy our beautiful ethnic patterns.

We are grateful to everyone who made it possible for the national costumes from Lithuania to come to our school.

Security

...The Seimas lowered the draft age for men from 19-26 years to 18-23 years to reduce the disruption in their civilian lives. It also banned volunteer soldiers from holding seats in the Seimas and municipal councils.

...The largest Lithuanian military purchase of 88 Boxer Infantry Fighting Vehicles has been held up by unresolved quality control factors. Ordered in August 2019 for 386 million euros and assembled by a consortium of German companies with an Israeli turret, the first two were delivered in June for inspection but were not accepted. The next 15 were to be delivered in 2019 but are now expected in January 2020.

...Lithuania and Latvia have jointly ordered gas masks from the UK's Scott Health & Safety Ltd. for delivery in March-April 2020. Lithuania will receive 9,000 for 1.2 million euros and Latvia will receive 14,000 for 1.8 million euros. Scott also received an associated contract for 15,000 filters for Lithuania and 14,000 filters for Latvia. The gas masks are aimed for both internal use and troops deployed on international operations.

...Per the new request of the USA, the Seimas has authorized five members of the Lithuanian Armed Forces to join international maritime operations in the Strait of Hormuz during 2020-2021. For the next two years, Lithuanian military may participate in existing 10 international operations include 60 troops for Afghanistan, Kosovo (up to 5), Iraq (up to 11), Operation Sophia in the Mediterranean (up to 20), anti-piracy Operation Atalanta off the Horn of Africa (up to 30), Mali (up to 11), and the Central African Republic (up to 11).

...With 500 U.S. troops in Lithuania as part of a NATO rotation, the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has identified a fake news story alleging two U.S. soldiers in Vilnius of trying to steal a BMW as part of disinformation and cyberattack by NATO adversaries. The Ministry thanked the "Lithuanian elves" for countering Russian online trolls and helping to deflect the 50,000 cyber-attacks annually.

...In 2019 Italy led an EU effort to integrate European military operations in the Mediterranean. In Ocean 2020, Lithuania and the Baltic Institute of Advanced Technology in Vilnius will extend such efforts to the Baltic Sea to combine real-time information on the marine environment from drones moving in the air, on the water, and underneath the sea. This is one of the first efforts funded under the EU Preparatory Action of Defense Research of 15 European countries with a 3 year - 35 million euro budget

lead by the European Defense Agency. More details on Ocean 2020 are available at <https://ocean2020.eu>.

...The Global Security and NATO in 2019 Seminar was held in Minsk, Belarus and was attended by domestic and foreign experts in international security, diplomats, and officials. Defender 2020, the largest NATO military exercise in 25 years will include 37,000 personnel from 18 countries. The exercise will test the ability to go from a U.S. fort to a port in the U.S. to ports in Europe to the Baltic nations and other Eastern European nations. The Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicates a desire to be invited as an observer.

...The Baltic Air Surveillance Network and Control System (BALNET) will be activated in 2020 which will link three air Command and Reporting Centers (CRCs) in Tallinn, Estonia, Lielvarde, Latvia, and Karmelava, Lithuania with full integration with NATO's Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) in Uedem, Germany for tracking civilian and military air traffic and responding as appropriate.

Business

...President Gitanas Nauseda and two members of the Seimas joined 50 farmers from Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia in Brussels to protest the European Union's budget which provides far lower subsidies for Central and Eastern European farmers than received by Western European farmers. The EU promised to rectify this discrepancy in 2002 under the Common Agricultural Policy which provides the payments but some farmers receive half the average subsidy to produce the same food to the same standards. The European Commission proposes to increase direct payments to Lithuanian farmers from the current 181 euros per hectare of arable land to 204 euros by 2027, compared with the current EU average of 266 euros.

...Go Vilnius has opened the Startup Museum which showcases success stories of twelve Lithuanian startups to inspire local and tourist entrepreneurs. Each startup has a timeline and story with lessons learned and challenges conquered with artifacts representing the journey, work culture, and values. The initial group includes Vinted - the pre-owned fashion marketplace, Nanoavionics - the nanosatellite manufacturer, Bored Panda - the pop culture magazine, CGTrader - the world's largest source of 3D models, Deeper - smart sonars, Tesonet - cybersecurity company, CityBee - shared cars and electric scooters, and Brolis Semiconductors, laser manufacturer. Each year the museum will add four notable startups. It is located at Talent Garden Vilnius co-working space Vilniaus g. 33

current events

with free admission. Register via email at vilnius@talent-garden.com.

...Lithuanian Railways announced that the 19-km railway line between Lithuania's Mazeikiai in Vilnius and Latvia's Renge has been rebuilt per demands of the European Union to further competition in the rail freight market. The line was used by Poland's Orlen oil company to transport oil products from Mazeikiai to Latvia but dismantled in 2008 to direct traffic to other routes. The EU imposed a fine of 28 million euros for hindering competition.

...The rebuilding cost 9.4 million euros and was carried out by Vitras-S, a railway construction and repair company owned by Skinest Rail of Estonia.

...Italy's Etea Group plans to utilize residual material from the processing of wheat into starch as feedstock for a new distillery in the northern city of Panevezys to produce ethyl alcohol. The company plans to invest 24.5 million euros in the distillery and employ 25 to annually produce 40 million liters of ethyl alcohol for the beverage, cosmetic, and pharmaceutical industries in 2021.

...The Lithuanian Gaming Supervisory Authority reported that wagering increased 10.1% to \$91.2 million in the first 9-months of 2019 over 2018. While 60% choose the instant lottery, other categories include digital, classic, as well as sports. The number of people gambling online went from 16% two years ago to the current rate of 30%. The Authority reported that legal operators had remitted taxes of 13.9 million euros.

...Vilnius Airport reports that it serviced a record 5 million passengers in 2019 versus 4.9 million in 2018. 2019 saw a new service to Eilat, Israel on the Red Sea, which averages 360 sunny days a year. 2020 will bring new destinations including Wizz Air-to Zaporizhia (Ukraine) and Yerevan (Armenia), and airBaltic-to Hamburg, Zurich, Gothenburg, Dubrovnik (Croatia), and Rijeda (Croatia). Vilnius Airport plans to open a VIP terminal in the first half of the year and begin construction of a new departure terminal.

...Milda Seputyte of Bloomberg Law reports that despite Lithuania being generally free of the money laundering scandals of Latvia and Estonia, the Lithuanian Central Bank Chairman Vitas Vasiliauskas complains that traditional correspondent banks are ending relationships with Lithuanian lenders to prevent potential damage to their reputations and the Lithuanian lenders face being cut off from the U.S. dollar system.

...GRH International of Monaco has established a company, GRH LT, in the Klaipeda Free Trade Zone to develop and manufacture multi-layered composite panels for the construction market. It plans to employ up to 50 people in R&D, production, and administrative functions. The port of Klaipeda is central to the plans of exporting its products to Scandinavia, the UK, and other foreign markets.

General

...Lithuanian Evaldas Rimasauskas was sentenced to 5 years in prison for scheming to defraud Google and Facebook of \$120 million by creating domains spoofing Quanta, a Taiwan contract server manufacturer, and directing payments for his fake invoices to be paid to his bank accounts. This Business Email Compromise (BEC) attack occurred between 2013 and 2015 and he was arrested by Lithuanian police in 2017 and extradited to the U.S. and tried in the Southern District of New York and faced 30 years in jail. He was also ordered to forfeit \$50 million, pay \$26.5 million in restitution, serve 2 years supervised release, and face deportation. In addition to praising the FBI, the U.S. Attorney thanked various Lithuanian groups including the Lithuanian Prosecutor General's Office and the Economic Crime Investigation Board of Vilnius County Police Headquarters.

...The Seimas passed the 2020 budget which calls for increasing the corporate tax rate for banks from 15 to 20% and expects an additional 20 million euro tax revenue. They also passed a car CO2 pollution tax which will go into effect in July and will be paid when the car is registered. The tax will range from several dozen to 1,400 euros depending on CO2 emissions. The levy will be even higher for diesel-powered cars. Annual tax revenue is expected to be about 29 million euros.

...The Hill of Crosses in northern Lithuania was the site of two incidents of vandalism by a couple of Chinese tourists who removed and trashed a wooden cross in support of Hong Kong pro-democracy movement and another who put graffiti on another cross.

...World Lacrosse of Colorado Springs, CO welcomed both Lithuania and Barbados national governing bodies to the international federation of 65 members with provisional recognition from the International Olympic Committee. The next world championships will be held in Los Angeles in 2022. LA is scheduled to host the 2028 Summer Olympic Games which is the target for lacrosse to return to the games.

Algimantas Gečys



Algimantas Gečys with Pope John Paul II in Rome in 1984 during the celebration of the 500 year anniversary of St. Casimir's death. Photo from the family album.

It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of ALGIMANTAS S. GEČYS on December 6, 2019. He leaves his wife of 60 years, Teresė; daughter Gintarė with husband George Akerley and grandson Kristijonas (Christian); daughter Aušra with husband Peter Gause; sister-in-law Danguolė Navickienė with daughter Rymantė Vizgirda; and son Tadas Vizgirda with family in Lithuania.

Algimantas was born on July 16, 1933, in Kaunas, Lithuania. Together with his parents, he left Lithuania in 1944. For five years, he lived in Hanau DP camp in Germany where he went to school. In 1949 his family emigrated to the United States of America and settled in Philadelphia. He earned a Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering and a Master's Degree in Engineering Administration from Drexel University in Philadelphia and worked in those fields until retirement.

Most of his after-work time Algimantas devoted to efforts on behalf of Lithuania and her freedom. For three terms, he served as President of the Lithuanian American Community National Committee. From 1981 to 1984, he served as Vice President of the Lithuanian World Community. From 1988 to 1992, Algimantas Gečys was a Lithuanian representative on Pennsylvania Governor's Ethnic



March 11, 2001 at the Lithuanian Embassy in Washington, DC. It was the day when the Lithuanian Community started working together with Lithuania towards achieving Lithuania's membership in NATO. Pictured in the center is Ambassador Vygaudas Ušackas. Photo from the family album.



The Lithuanian American Community 15th Council session in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1997. Third from left is LAC Presidium Chairman Donatas Skučas. Lithuania's Ambassador Stasys Sakalauskas is on the right, by the American flag. Photo from the family album.

Council. Since 1994, he was a member of the Advisory Council of the Lithuanian Embassy in Washington, D.C. Algimantas was one of the strong supporters of the saving and preservation of the Lithuanian Embassy building before the restoration of Lithuanian Independence. Algimantas contributed articles to Lithuanian publications, and in 1977, he started BRIDGES, a monthly journal intended for Lithuanian non-speakers interested in their ethnic heritage. For his meaningful and active participation in Lithuanian affairs, Algimantas Gečys was awarded the Republic of Lithuania Commander's Cross and Lithuanian Parliament Medal of Honor.

our community

DeVonis – Novek Family Fund



At the end of 2019, the Lithuanian Foundation established a new donor-directed fund. DeVonis – Novek Family Fund was set up by sisters Carolyn Fisk and Janet Henderson, in memory of their mother, Nellie DeVonis, and aunt, Sally Novek.

In a letter to the LF, Janet Henderson writes: "Carolyn and I feel we are who we are and have what we have thanks to our Lithuanian heritage. Therefore, we want to promote Lithuanian Education and Culture to honor our families."

The interests of this donor-directed fund will go to scholarships for young medical students in Lithuania or the US. Also, support of Lithuanian history, language, and music awareness, emphasizing the development and promotion of Lithuanian folk-dance groups in the northeastern US states (giving priority to projects in Rochester, NY).

Photo: (from the left), Janet Henderson, Nellie DeVonis, Sally Novek, and Carolyn Fisk. (From personal album.)

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