

# bridges



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3



3 Chicago Lithuanians Celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Restoration of Lithuania's Independence

By Karilė Vaitkutė

11



7 Courage, Good Friends, and Good Fortune  
Recalling How Lithuania Restored Its Independence

By Viktoras Nakas

11 The 100-year Birthday of Lithuania's Freedom Bell Commemorated

By Audronė Telšinskienė

Translated from Lithuanian by Vijolė Arbas

13 Quarantine Margučiai

By Viltė Vaitkutė

16 Far From Civilization

By Paula Martinson

18 Sunlight Rays Keep the Glow

By Indrė Tijūnelis

13



**2 from the editor**

By Karilė Vaitkutė

**our community**

21 Colorado Lithuanian School Celebrated Its Two Years!

By Simona Bataitytė

**taste of Lithuania**

22 Varškės Skarelės su Obuoliais

Farmer Cheese Cookies with Apples

By Jana Sirusaitė-Motivans

24 current events

By Alan Stankus

18



Front Cover: Easter Eggs. Photo by Peder Goodman.

Back Cover: Spring in Illinois. Photo by Karilė Vaitkutė.

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## from the editor

Dear readers,

Certainly, this year's April has been different from all others. Not only the Lithuanian American Community, not only the United States of America but the whole world has been taken into the clutches of the coronavirus "regime". Most states issued stay-at-home or shelter-in-place orders. No going out, no get-togethers, no trips, no events, no celebrations, no hugs... Our cities and towns, our community venues, our schools became empty creating an eerie feeling. Those of us who are "non-essential" workers just stay at home and follow the news, hoping that this situation will end sooner than later. However, those of us who are "essential" workers risk their lives and health every day working in hospitals, stores, and elsewhere. Many of us are still healthy and safe but many have fallen ill. Many of us might need help. The Lithuanian-American Community has formed a volunteer group that collects and coordinates information on the need for and assistance to Lithuanians in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. This way, we will do our best to help those who currently need help the most.

In this difficult and challenging time, as the COVID-19 pandemic is raging across the world, the Lithuanian-American Community, in cooperation with the Lithuanian Embassy in Washington, invites you to work together. It has never been more meaningful and important to reach out and help one another. Let's help Lithuanians who either live in the United States or stay here temporarily and who are facing unexpected difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic - who are at higher risk or need information, advice or other help. We know that by working together, we can overcome the threat that the coronavirus poses and meet the challenges we all face.

Let's share what we are rich in – our kindness, advice, volunteering, knowledge, and financial support. Then we will all be much richer and stronger, and our hearts will be filled with hope and faith. Let's stay healthy and strong!

You can find more information on the Lithuanian American Community coronavirus help page at <https://covid19.javlb.org/>.

Wishing you the strength to endure this trying time,

Karilė Vaitkutė  
Editor

# Chicago Lithuanians Celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Restoration of Lithuania's Independence

By Karilė Vaitkutė



From left: Consul General Mantvydas Bekešius, Eglė Bekešius, and LAC President Arvydas Urbonavičius.

March 11th. This date makes the heart of every Lithuanian beat faster. It has been thirty years since Lithuania became free again. We are already used to it being free; a new generation has already grown up. A generation that doesn't know what it means to not be free. However, those of us who lived under the Soviet occupation in Lithuania know it quite well. March 11th is dear to the heart of every Lithuanian, but for those who have suffered oppression, it is probably even more special. "History of Lithuania began more than a thousand years ago; however, March 11th is the most important date in the history of modern Lithuania," Consul General of the Republic of Lithuania Mantvydas Bekešius said in his speech. This year's celebration of the restoration of our independence in Chicago was very beautiful, even though it took place „under the shadow of coronavirus“.

The Consulate General of the Republic of Lithuania

hosted the celebration in the prestigious and historic Union League Club building in downtown Chicago. The Union League of America was founded during the American Civil War to support Abraham Lincoln and preserve the Union. The celebration of Lithuania's independence took place in Abraham Lincoln Hall. From a portrait on the wall, the President of the United States looked at us - American Americans celebrating Lithuanian freedom.

As mentioned, the celebration, unfortunately, took place “under the shadow of the coronavirus.” Just that evening, the City of Chicago announced that large gatherings would no longer be possible due to the threat of the Coronavirus, schools and universities were to be closed. It started feeling like „the last“ celebration to be held. More than 200 guests came to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the restoration of Lithuania's independence, members of the diplomatic corps, honorary consuls, leaders of various



Illinois state organizations and businesses, leaders and members of the Lithuanian community in the United States among them.

"Today, Lithuania is bigger than we see it on the world map. Lithuania is where there are Lithuanians, where traditions and culture have not been forgotten, where the National Anthem is sung," Consul General of the Republic of Lithuania in Chicago Mantvydas Bekešius said. "I am glad that we, Lithuanians in the USA, can come together and be united, that we help Lithuanian businesses to discover new markets, that we invest in our country and, most importantly, that we are proud of our roots."

Pride in our roots is also reflected in the activities of American Lithuanians, in their work not only for the benefit of their community but also for the benefit of Lithuania. Michael Madigan, Speaker of the Illinois State House of Representatives, who grew up in the Marquette Park area of Chicago, where Lithuanians have lived for a long time, emphasized in his congratulatory speech that the Lithuanian ethnic community has always been and remains strong and able to make a difference. Michael Madigan especially praised Stanley Balzekas, Jr., the founder of the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture, saying that people like him not only make their ethnic community strong but the United States of America strong. Congratulatory letters came from Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, US Senator Tammy Duckworth, and Illinois Senator Dick Durbin.

It is gratifying that during the celebration, prominent figures of our community were honored. Consul General Mantvydas Bekešius submitted recommendations to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania regarding the awarding of the badge of honor "For the Merits of World Lithuanians to Lithuania". The founder of the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture in Chicago and Honorary Consul of the Republic of Lithuania in Florida Stanley Balzekas, Jr. and Rimas Banyš, a long-time patron of the Chicago Lithuanian community and a sponsor of the World Lithuanian Center was awarded the prestigious Golden Vytis Award. This award was established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania in 2019, and so far, only a few people have received it, namely President Valdas Adamkus, Archbishop Metropolitan Gintaras Grušas, and Prelate Edmundas Putrimas.

Also awarded were Marija Remienė, former chairwoman of the longest-running diaspora newspaper *Draugas*,



Members of the Suktinis dance group.



From left: Eglė Bekešius, Vytautas Sruoga, LAV Vice-President Austėja Sruoga, Consul General Mantvydas Bekešius.



From left: Antanas Rašymas, Audrius Plioplys, Consul General Mantvydas Bekešius, Vida Rupšienė, Robertas Vitas.



Consul General Mantvydas Bekešius.

Juozas Jonas Polikaitis, a long-term leader of the American Lithuanian Community and a member of the Draugas Newspaper Council, Gražina Gudaitytė-Liautaud, a patron who founded the Children's Hope Foundation, and Asta Zimkus, the head of the Lithuanian Art Museum and Art Gallery Siela.

Famous Lithuanian singer, songwriter, and performer Gintarė Jautakaitė performed during the celebration. The main sponsor of the event was Chicago company Hollister, which in the fall of 2019 opened a factory in Kaunas and invested 50 million euros. Consul General Mantvydas Bekešius proudly emphasized that American Lithuanian businesses had created thousands of jobs in Illinois and

Chicago. However, the state of Illinois is also investing in Lithuania. Hollister company, which opened its branch in Lithuania last year and created 200 jobs, proves it. "Over the past five years, the United States has become one of the leading countries to invest in Lithuania," Consul General said. "More than 6,000 jobs have been created, more than 50 investment projects have been launched, and nearly \$ 650 million has been invested."

The 30th anniversary of the restoration of Lithuania's independence in Chicago was also supported by American American businesses, such as GP Transco, HMD Trucking, the law firm Boodell & Domanskis LLC and the most famous Lithuanian food restaurant in Chicago, Grand Dukes. Of course, like many Lithuanian events, the celebration was supported by the Lithuanian Foundation. The next day after the celebration we heard the news that the United States was closing its borders and would not allow passengers from Europe for at least thirty days and it will no longer be possible to hold mass events in Illinois with more than a thousand people. We are no longer living in the grip of the political occupation; instead, now we are in the clutches of the Coronavirus regime. Restrictions on our free movement and the emerging economic crisis are the challenges of modern times. And it makes us feel again how precious and how fragile freedom is.



From left: Juozas Polikaitis, Asta Zimkus, Maria Remys, Gražina Liautaud, Stanley Balzekas, Jr., Mantvydas Bekešius.





Lithuanian traditional refreshments served by the Grand Dukes Restaurant.



Speaker of the Illinois State House of Representatives Michael Madigan.



Celebrating Lithuanian Independence in the Abraham Lincoln Hall. Photos by Sandra Ščedrina, Studio Light, Inc.



Singer and songwriter Gintarė Jautkaitė.

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# Courage, Good Friends, and Good Fortune

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## Recalling How Lithuania Restored Its Independence

Remarks to Seattle Lithuanian American Community (March 7, 2020)

By Viktoras Nakas

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you today. Though I've never met most of you, I have warm feelings for the Seattle Lithuanian American community because of what happened 30 years ago. In the remarks to follow, you will notice me using the number "3" quite a few times. Here's the first instance: I feel a connection with Seattle for three reasons: First, the current leader of your community, Rasa Raišys, served as an intern in my office during the summer of 1989. I was fortunate to have many bright and eager students like Rasa from various parts of the United States cycle through the Lithuanian Information Center in Washington, DC, between 1987 and 1991. Second, during those years I collaborated closely with the then-president of the Seattle Lithuanian-American Community, Ina Bertulytė Bray. Her leadership was important to ensure continued strong support for the Lithuanian cause by one of the most noble-minded members of Congress that I ever had the privilege to work with. He is the third connection I have to Seattle.

I refer to the late Congressman John Miller, who represented the 1st Congressional District from 1985 to 1993. His good friend, Catholic author George Weigel, recruited Miller, a Republican who was Jewish, to form a group of Congressmen in spring 1987 who would dedicate themselves to defending the religious rights of Catholics in Lithuania. One of Miller's first initiatives occurred when I was just a few weeks into my job. As a Congressional delegation was preparing to visit the Soviet Union,

Congressman Miller set up and accompanied me to separate private meetings with two of your other Washington State Congressmen — House Majority Leader Tom Foley and Congressman Norman Dicks — as well as the ranking Republican on the delegation, Congressman Dick Cheney. I briefed them on Lithuanian prisoners of conscience and other religious rights issues in advance of their meetings with Soviet officials.

Congressman Miller recruited Cleveland Democrat Edward Feighan to join him in co-chairing the Lithuanian Catholic Religious Liberty Group. Over the course of one year, they sent seven letters (co-signed by scores of their fellow members of Congress) to Soviet officials on behalf of specific individuals who were being persecuted. In fall 1987, a resolution sponsored by Miller and Feighan calling on the USSR to respect the religious rights of believers in Lithuania was adopted in the U.S. House of Representatives by a vote of 400 to 0.

News of these initiatives was beamed by Voice of America to Lithuania and was picked up by various other news outlets. I could easily devote the remainder of my remarks to Congressman Miller, but you get the idea. Eventually, his support morphed into efforts to champion Lithuanian independence and he was one of a quartet of Congressmen who visited Lithuania in February 1990, the first such U.S. delegation. Those of you who encouraged his efforts 30 years ago can take great pride in all he did for Lithuania. He richly deserves to be remembered, as indeed do



all the members of the U.S. Congress who generously supported our cause.

When I was a high school student growing up in Detroit, Michigan, in the 60s and 70s, Lithuania was not so much a place as it was an idea. It was the land that belonged to my parents, an idealized homeland I learned about at the Saturday school I was compelled to attend. I socialized with other Lithuanian children but outside our ethnic community, there was little to affirm my heritage. From the dominant Western perspective, Lithuania was a non-entity — a former state, a former nation, on the way to extinction thanks to Russification enforced by an army of occupation. Even the word “occupation” was almost never used by Western journalists because that would imply someone was being held captive and thus needed to be freed. Instead, Lithuania was erased; it was simply part of the USSR, end of discussion. I saw the first dramatic glimmer of hope that this narrative might be false in May 1972 when the Western press reported briefly on anti-Soviet riots that had broken out in Kaunas, Lithuania, over the self-immolation of a young man about my age who was protesting Soviet rule. I felt a strong affinity for the idea he was proclaiming. But after that, the shroud of silence enveloped Lithuania again and it was a rare occurrence to see even a corner of it lifted briefly.

In 1985, the Communist Party Politburo selected Mikhail Gorbachev as its general secretary. He soon embarked on policies of perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness) to jump-start the moribund Soviet system. Gorbachev was a great — perhaps indispensable — gift to the Baltic peoples but not for the reasons commonly attributed to him in the West. A confirmed Communist to the end of his autocratic rule, Gorbachev was also a wheeler-dealer supremely confident in his own ability to play competing forces off against each other and to charm or bully his way out of difficulty. And yet he was profoundly ignorant about the desires of non-Russian nations that had been forced to live under Soviet domination. Without realizing it, he carelessly left the keys dangling in the prison cell door and, when the jailbreak occurred, proved himself unwilling to shoot everyone as they made a dash for freedom.

Of course, someone had to turn the key in the jail cell and take the first tentative steps outside it. That task fell to the three Baltic nations. The occasion was the 48th anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In its secret protocols, Nazi Germany had agreed with the USSR to consign Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to Soviet domination. Peaceful demonstrations were staged in the Baltic capitals on August 23, 1987, to condemn that pact. Lithuania’s was the smallest — about 500 brave souls. Despite the modest numbers, the demonstration was such sensational news that it merited

front-page coverage in *The New York Times*, an astonishing occurrence for nations that had been expunged from the American consciousness. On that day a match was lit; the resulting fire was never to be extinguished. As time went on the blaze came to be increasingly difficult for the Kremlin to control. Consider the three successive Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact anniversaries in Lithuania that commenced in 1987. As I said the first attracted roughly 500 people. The second drew a crowd that was larger by a factor of at least 200 — conservative estimates put the rally at 100,000 participants, with one scholarly source saying there may have been up to 250,000. A year after that, on August 23, 1989, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians formed a human chain spanning nearly 420 miles through their republics. An estimated 2 million people participated, roughly 25 percent of the population of the Baltic states.

If the dash to freedom had been a contest among the Balts, in the early months Lithuania would have found itself in 2nd or 3rd place. It decisively took the lead on March 11, 1990, when it became the first of the 15 Soviet-ruled republics to declare that it was leaving the USSR. That action put Lithuania in the crosshairs of the Kremlin. Various forms of intimidation, including troop movements and an economic blockade, followed.

Western media had been paying close attention to the evolution of events in the Baltic region since August 1987. For journalists, the story grew ever more attractive. What would General Secretary Gorbachev, who craved the West’s respect as a reformer and needed its financial help, do with the recalcitrant Lithuanians? No less interesting was the dilemma faced by President George H.W. Bush. For 50 years, thanks partly, maybe mostly, to Baltic-American pressure, the United States had refused to recognize the illegal incorporation of the Baltic states by the USSR. Now that Lithuania’s first democratically elected parliament of the post-World War II era had announced that it was immediately restoring its independent statehood, the U.S. should have moved without delay to establish formal ties with Vilnius. That would have been a logical consequence of the non-recognition policy. Bush immediately felt the heat from three sources to do just that: the government in Vilnius; Lithuanian-Americans who had been dreaming of this scenario for 50 long years; and a significant contingent of U.S. Congressmen and Senators, especially those with Baltic-American constituents. Bush declined, counseling patience and negotiations.

But he was not immune to pressure. It forced him to grant an Oval Office meeting with Lithuanian Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskienė in May 1990, followed in the months to come by similar meetings with Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis and his Latvian and Estonian counterparts. President Bush similarly felt com-

pelled to urge Gorbachev repeatedly to negotiate with the Lithuanians. To bolster his argument, Bush could point the Soviet leader to Congressional action on behalf of Lithuania. For example, on May 1, nearly ¾ of the U.S. Senate voted for a resolution to withhold U.S. trade benefits from the USSR until Gorbachev lifted the economic blockade and entered into dialogue with Vilnius.

Bush was ambivalent about Lithuania's independence. As the historical record shows, he was uncomfortable with dramatic change and uneasy around people like Poland's Lech Wałęsa and Lithuania's Landsbergis, whom he considered radicals. Both he and his national security adviser believed that the dissolution of the USSR would create instability and thus was not in the U.S. interest. Also, in 1990 Bush was eager to keep Gorbachev happy as West and East Germany prepared for reunification and the latter exited the Warsaw Pact.

The pressure on Bush to recognize Lithuania did have limits. In March, following Lithuania's declaration of independence, one U.S. Senator made an ill-considered decision to introduce a resolution advocating the immediate recognition of Lithuanian statehood, without ascertaining if he had the necessary votes. It failed, with 36 Senators in favor, 59 opposed. In April a poll conducted by NBC and the Wall Street Journal showed that 61% of respondents favored Gorbachev over Lithuania. And on April 21, a New York Times editorial recommended that Bush "lean on the Lithuanians."

In the months that followed, Lithuania sought to negotiate with the USSR, with the caveat that it would not rescind its independence declaration. Gorbachev dragged his heels on talking to Vilnius and continued to make threats, all the while assuring Bush that he wouldn't resort to violence. Meanwhile, hard-line Communists in the Soviet military, secret police, and party structures pressured Gorbachev, accusing him of having lost Eastern Europe and of waffling on the Baltic problem. To mollify them, he aligned himself with their hard-line positions, allowing elite Soviet paratroopers to be sent to the Baltic states in the first days of 1991.

The result was a disaster for Gorbachev and could have been one for Lithuanian independence as well. On January 13, three months after Gorbachev was selected to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, Soviet tanks were deployed to seize control of the Lithuanian TV tower in Vilnius. They were met by unarmed Lithuanian civilians who blocked their way. Fifteen Lithuanians were fatally shot by paratroopers or trampled to death, as Western media observed. Perhaps unnerved by the unarmed human shields, Soviet troops took the TV tower but left the job unfinished. They did not storm the barricaded Lithuanian parliament.

Gorbachev may have calculated that the U.S. would be

too distracted by its own preparations for an imminent military offensive on behalf of Kuwait to focus on Vilnius. He may also have believed that, in gratitude for his support for the upcoming U.S. military campaign against Soviet ally Iraq, the U.S. would look the other way if he managed to quickly and bloodlessly overthrow Lithuanian democracy. But the significant Lithuanian loss of life under gruesome circumstances, coupled with eyewitness Western reporting, caused a firestorm of criticism in the West and the Soviet Union, including in Russia itself.

Though Bush continued to stand by Gorbachev, he could not save him. No longer able to successfully maneuver between Soviet hardliners and reformers, Gorbachev came to be deeply distrusted at best, hated at worst, by both sides. On August 18, 1991, Communist hardliners deposed him but, again, a loss of nerve doomed the coup after a few days. When Gorbachev emerged from house arrest, most of his political power had evaporated and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics entered into a death spiral. The United States recognized Lithuania's independence on September 2nd and by the end of the year, the USSR ceased to exist.

Those of us who followed these events as they unfolded may remember 1990 and 1991 as an immensely exciting and nerve-racking time during which for days on end Lithuania enjoyed center stage in the West. We should cherish the memory of the courage shown then by the Lithuanian people and be content that we in the diaspora created and sustained conditions that vastly improved their chances for success. In 1989 and 1990 when Soviet forces had used lethal violence against demonstrators in Georgia and Azerbaijan, the U.S. government had merely shrugged. Time and again, President Bush preferred General Secretary Gorbachev over President Landsbergis, the USSR over Lithuania. But it was politically untenable for President Bush to simply shrug off the idea of Lithuanian independence. Among a segment of American voters, so strongly felt was the resentment over his tepid support for Lithuanian freedom that it may have contributed to his failed bid for a second term as president.

In the 30 years that have elapsed since Lithuania wriggled out of the Soviet straightjacket, the country has spared no effort to become an integral part of the Western community of nations. Three decades ago, I wonder how many people would have been bold enough to predict that Lithuania would become a member of the European Union as well as NATO and that NATO allied forces would be deployed to Lithuania. In 1990 Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders mocked the idea that Lithuania could prosper as an independent state, pointing out that its economy was inextricably linked to the Soviet system. And yet Lithuania's gross domestic product has grown from 8 billion U.S. dollars in 1994 to 50 billion dollars

in 2019.

To this point, I've been focusing on the era of Lithuanian independence that commenced March 11, 1990. Let's turn briefly to the other period of modern Lithuanian statehood, which began February 16, 1918. Two years of warfare against three foes and well over a thousand dead was the price Lithuania paid to consolidate its independence in 1921. By contrast, when Lithuania broke away from the USSR in March 1990, it took 18 months and cost fewer than 25 Lithuanian lives to accomplish the same result.

The first Lithuanian nation-state lasted only 22 years. By the latter half of the 1930s, it was in peril. Consider this: In March 1938 Lithuania was forced to capitulate to a Polish demand within 48 hours to establish diplomatic relations with Warsaw and thereby recognize de facto Polish rights to and control over the Vilnius region. In March 1939, Nazi Germany gave Lithuania an ultimatum — hand over the Klaipėda Region or face a German attack. Lithuania acceded. In October of that year, the Kremlin forced Lithuania to accept military bases and to host thousands of Red Army troops on Lithuanian soil. When the Soviets formally occupied Lithuania the following year, President Antanas Smetona advocated a call to arms but he was outvoted by his cabinet and military officers, who concluded that resistance to Soviet troops already garrisoned in Lithuania would be futile.

In those years, Lithuania faced three aggressive neighbors; two of them were led by genocidal monsters. Lithuania's prospects in 2020 are far superior to what they were before World War II. Happily, neither Poland nor Germany poses any threat to Lithuania; both countries have forsworn claims to the Klaipėda and Vilnius regions.

Of course, Lithuania is not without enemies. Lithuania's Defense Ministry and State Security agency identify Russia and China as its two greatest threats. Russian leader Vladimir Putin once stated that the dissolution of the USSR was "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the 20th century. He busies himself in Crimea, trying to undo part of that catastrophe.

Thankfully, Putin does not have a free hand in the Baltics. It's not even in his sphere of influence. Lithuania has used the last 30 years well, spinning an intricate web of economic, financial, political, and military ties with its neighbors to the West and across the Atlantic Ocean. The West has a vested interest in Lithuania's continued success as never before. Here in this country, Putin's meddling in U.S. elections has infuriated the political class to levels not seen since the Cold War and predisposed it to support Lithuania.

Lithuanians have learned from the painful lessons of the past. It is inconceivable that, were Putin or his successor ever to launch military operations against Lithu-

ania, the Lithuanians would give up without fierce armed resistance. From afar we observe how the nation's leaders continue to nurture the spirit of vigilant independence and inculcate new generations with it. We see it in the reverential treatment they accord to the memory of partisans who resisted the Soviet occupation following World War II. It's on display every year during the January 13 commemoration that sometimes seems to outshine the March 11 celebration in the significance accorded to it. We see it as, decades after the fact, Lithuania continues to seek to bring the perpetrators of the January 13 killings to justice.

Given where Lithuania is situated in Europe, a brave citizenry and a thirst for freedom are necessary conditions for establishing and maintaining an independent nation-state. But if we've learned anything from Lithuanian history, it is that for more than a century those conditions haven't been sufficient. You need luck as well. In 1938 Lithuania was a profoundly unlucky nation-state. Fifty years later, Lithuania threaded a needle to restore its independence. It was lucky that Mikhail Gorbachev behaved like an inattentive jail warden. Lithuania was fortunate that the Soviet generals or Gorbachev, or both, lost their nerve on January 13, lucky that eight months later the hardliners who deposed the Soviet leader were no match for the democratic forces aligned with Boris Yeltsin. Had any of these circumstances been different, Lithuania today might still have the words "Soviet Socialist Republic" attached to its name and the world we live in might be different.

Let us hope that for at least as long as we and our children's children live, Lithuania's leaders and the people they represent continue to be courageous and resolute in defense of their freedom. And let's hope that good fortune continues to smile on the Lithuanian nation.

These remarks were prepared for the March 11 Independence Day commemoration organized by the Seattle Lithuanian American Community. Due to the coronavirus outbreak, the commemoration was canceled.



Victor Nakas was the Washington manager of the Brooklyn-based Lithuanian Information Center from 1987 to 1991, and served as the chief of staff and political and press officer at the Embassy of Lithuania in Washington from 1991 to 1993.



# The 100-year Birthday of Lithuania's Freedom Bell Commemorated

By Audronė Telšinskienė

Translated from Lithuanian by Vijolė Arbas



Society of Lithuanian Campanologists, ‘Societas campanarum Lituaniae’, held a celebratory commemoration of the 100-year birthday of Lithuania’s Freedom Bell in Kaunas.

Holy Mass at Šv. Jurgio (St. George’s) Franciscan Church, started off the festivities. This church and monastic ensemble is one of the oldest surviving structures in Kaunas. Its construction had started around 1492 and completed around 1502. The architect is believed to be Michael Enkinger, who also designed Šv. Onos (St. Anne’s) and Bernardinų (Bernardine) Churches in Vilnius.

Franciscan Father Paulius Saulius Bytautas warmly met the Society’s members, and a conversation ensued about their church bells and their histories.

Everyone next turned towards the Vytautas Magnus War Museum. A tower in its courtyard draws attention. It safeguards a symbol of importance to Lithuania—Freedom Bell. Bells of this type are rare in the world—there are only one each in Philadelphia USA, Mexico City Mexico, Oslo Norway and Kaunas Lithuania. The last one

rang for the first time one hundred years ago.

Attorney Jonas Bagdžiūnas-Borden wanted to find a way to make Lithuania’s name famous. He made a proposal at a conference of Lithuanians in Chicago to cast a Freedom Bell as a symbol of independence and present it to the Seimas parliamentary body of American- Lithuanians. His idea associated with the Liberty Bell of the United States, which rang on July 8, 1776 at a public reading of America’s Declaration of Independence.

Thus the Freedom Bell was ordered and cast at the St. Louis metallurgy plant according to the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia—a vitally important symbol of American independence. This bell measured 4 feet (121.92 cm) in height and 3 feet (91.44 cm) in width. It weighs 1000 pounds (500 kg) without its framework and 1200 pounds (600 kg) with frame.

The text written by a Lithuanian diplomat and community activist Bronius Kazys Balutis appears on one side of the bell—“O skambink per amžius vaikams Lietuvos, kad laisvės nevertas, kas negina jos [Oh ring o’er ages for



Lithuania's children, unworthy of freedom are those who won't stand in its defense]." On the other side, the engraving reads—"Amerikos Lietuvių seimas Lietuvai, birželio 9, 10 ir 11 d. 1919 m. [Seimas of American-Lithuanians for Lithuania, June 9, 10 and 11, 1919] Chicago, IL."

Upon the unveiling of the Freedom Bell, it rang for the first time on June 8, 1919 in Chicago's Auditorium Theater, at the eve of the American-Lithuanian Seimas meeting. The Bell travelled all over the United States for a year raising donations. Finally, on August 20, 1920, Freedom Bell Committee Chairman Jonas Bagdžiūnas officially transferred it to Jonas Vileišis, the representative for Lithuania. Although the American-Lithuanian community intended the Freedom Bell to hand in the tower of Gediminas Castle, unfortunately, Poland occupied Vilnius at the time. Therefore, it was impossible to do so. The Cabinet of Ministers decided to transfer the bell to the War Museum in Kaunas, the interim capital. For a month, the bell was on display by the monument "For those who died for Lithuania's Freedom" outdoors. Then, on February 16, it was ceremoniously lifted into the museum's belltower and blessed.

During the years between World Wars, the Freedom

Bell would ring on political, militaristic and cultural holidays.

The bell was silent during the years of Soviet and Nazi occupations. The only exception was on the June 23, 1941 Uprising against a defeated Russia. It tolled to announce the reestablishment of independence (which unfortunately was not yet fated). The Bell ceased tolling for long decades ahead.

It rang out again on February 16, 1989, as the Statue of Freedom was being unveiled. The belltower of the Vytautas Magnus War Museum had to be renovated in 2005, so the bell was taken down and put on display inside the museum. Today it hangs proudly in the museum's belltower ringing forth on rare, celebratory occasions. Thus it is being heard but not seen.

Members of the Society of Lithuanian Campanologists are delighted with their exceptional privilege of the right to enter the Vytautas Magnus Belltower. There they can touch the bell and hear it tolling from close up.

The Society spent a memorable day visiting the bell in 2018. President Leonardas Šablinskas gave every member a small, symbolic representation of the bell during a festive lunch together for a special remembrance.



# Quarantine Margučiai

By Viltė Vaitkutė



As a person in her 20s, each new year brings change into my life, whether it be a new job, new apartment, or new friends. Your 20s, I'm beginning to understand, are a decade of relentless change. However, every Easter, of all holidays, I find some stillness in a Lithuanian tradition I've practiced since early childhood with my family in Chicago – making margučiai, Easter eggs. Living in Iowa, where there is no organized Lithuanian-American community, I forget that the people surrounding me, although of course familiar with dying Easter eggs, are not so familiar with the methods that have become second nature to me. Every year when I come back to this tradition, it juxtaposes all the new that has inevitably come into my life. I find myself re-demonstrating and sharing the same methods with new people, in new places, year after year. In 2016 I made margučiai with one of my first college friends. In 2017 I introduced this tradition to Peder, who, at that time, I had been dating for roughly a year. I studied abroad in Madrid in 2018, where I made margučiai with my host family and roommates – that was quite a blend of Easter traditions! Last year, I made margučiai with Peder

and a couple of new friends in a new apartment. I have to say, making Easter eggs is not the number one thing on young peoples' minds come springtime, but every year I somehow end up hearing from a friend how fun or interesting it was making margučiai with me.

This year also brought change. The Coronavirus pandemic has been holding us all in our homes, separated, stagnant, and many unemployed. It's a new world, where nothing, if you're a non-essential worker, seems to have moved from its place in weeks, while simultaneously, if you listen to the news, whirling around you like a storm. Peder and I have been quietly staring at our computer screens in our pajamas, trying to work from home, now and again getting up for coffee. Outside, birds chirp. Our news podcasts color a desperate situation nationwide. The need for more action in our home space and some distraction from the news became unbearable. So we adopted a cat.

She has already helped Peder and I return to our centers a little bit. She also came just in time for margučiai-making. The tradition lives on – in the midst of the chaos



and the change, I get to share this steady tradition with someone new (this year, quarantine-style, and not only with the cat, but with all of you readers as well).

In case any of you readers have not made margučiai before, I'd like to share how I tend to make them every year. It's very easy and no special equipment is required – usually, everything you need is already in your home! There are a variety of colors you can make from natural dyes (spices, leaves, etc) but this year I went for blue (purple cabbage) and tried for a peach color with beet and tur-

meric powder, but ended up with a sort of brown. We also didn't go outside to pick any flowers or grasses to press onto the eggs this year, but had a bunch of parsley in the fridge and rice in the pantry that worked perfectly. Onion skins hold the designs in place while giving a very nice orangey-brown color (and the onions they surrounded present a good opportunity for onion soup)! I also had no problem finding some ruined tights (I think only maybe 10% of my tights don't have holes in them) to hold the eggs, but a cheesecloth would work fine here too.

Here are the steps:

1. Prepare a color bath for your eggs by mixing an ingredient (like grated purple cabbage) with water and a splash of vinegar.



Materials. Photo by Peder Goodman

2. Place your leaves and grains of choice (like parsley and rice) on your white egg. Water helps keep from moving around. Keep your water in a larger bowl to prevent the cat from spilling it over.

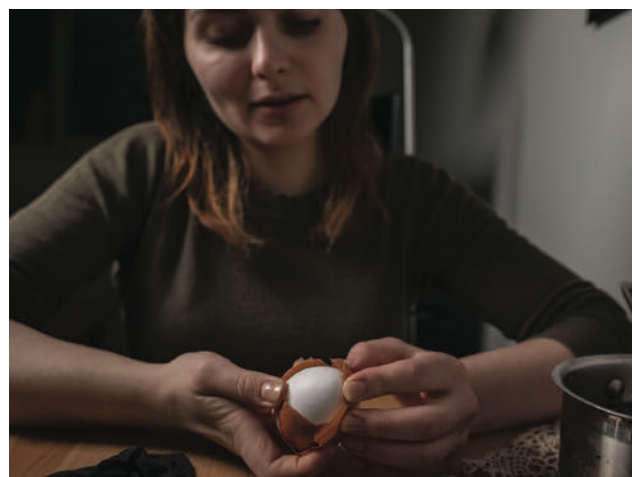


Placing parsley to leave its impressions on the eggs. Photo by Peder Goodman



The cat wants to help. Photo by Viltė Vaitkutė

3. Wrap your egg in onion skins. You can add as much or as little as you'd like – keep in mind, the areas that are covered will more likely turn brown, and the areas that are left bare will turn the color of your color bath.



Viltė wrapping eggs in onion skins. Photo by Peder Goodman

4. Place your egg in one of the tights and secure tightly with a knot. It's okay if your designs move around a bit – in my opinion, the eggs end up looking better when there is less intention behind the placement of the leaves and grains!



Peder securing the eggs in tights. Photo by Viltė Vaitkutė



Making more. Photo by Viltė Vaitkutė

5. When all the eggs are secured, place them in the color baths and boil for roughly ten minutes. Then, leave overnight.



Placing eggs in natural dyes to boil and sit overnight. Photo by Peder Goodman

In the morning, you'll have some margučiai! Peder and I shared some of these eggs for breakfast, hitting them against one another to see whose chosen egg is stronger (I won). We drank our coffee. Birds chirped outside. The cat begged for butter. Then, we returned to our work.



The results. Photo by Peder Goodman

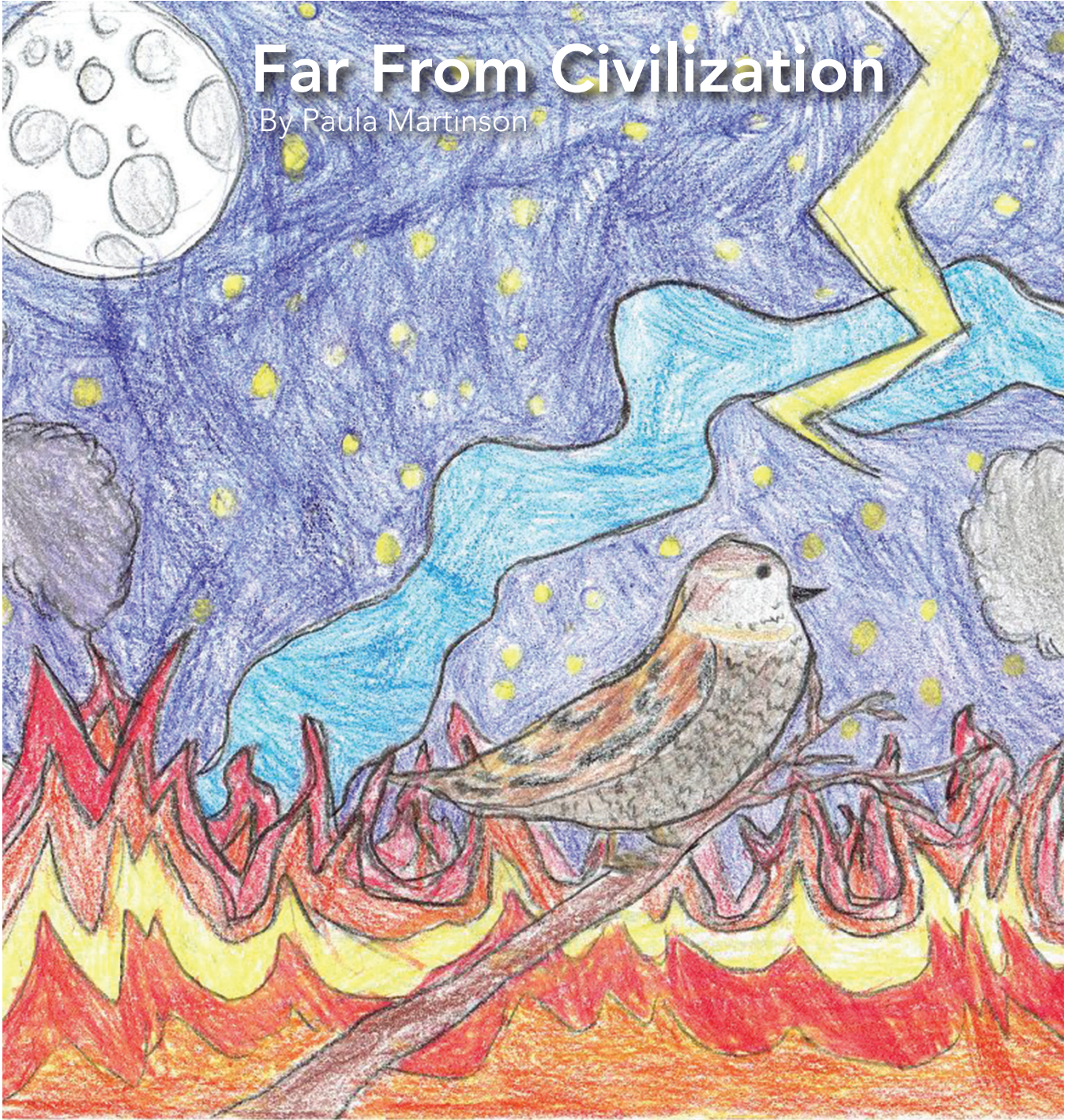
If you make margučiai, I hope this year it brought you back to a world of nostalgia and fun. If you don't, I hope you try to make some, even if Easter is over. Or, take some time to make any sort of craft that is special to you. Whatever your springtime traditions, I hope you all find something that brings you some stillness and joy during this uncertain time. Hopefully, we can all soon emerge from the uncertainty and return to positive change.

Happy Easter!



# Far From Civilization

By Paula Martinson



Far from civilization and hidden behind the tall, full trees, lived a troll; a troll with green skin, warts covering him from head to toe, and a putrid smell radiated off of him. Although not aggressive, he appeared scary, disgusting, and rejected. He tried making friends with the village people nearby, but they spat at him, threw rocks at him, and screamed when he got too close. The troll had no one to talk to, so he decided to make his own friends.

He spent many hours each day inside his cave carving wooden animals of all shapes and sizes. He first created a little cat. He placed the little cat on a shelf and talked to it constantly. Since the wooden cat was the only thing around that he could talk to, he treated it like it was alive. He held hour-long conversations with the wooden sculpture. Although the sculpture could not reply with words, the troll felt as though it listened. One night the



troll settled into his bed, turned to the wooden cat sitting on his shelf, and said, “goodnight my kind friend.” The next morning the troll woke up to something unexpected, a meowing noise. The meowing confused the troll. He turned to the shelf and did not see the wooden cat on it anymore. From underneath the bed came meowing noises again, followed by a little wooden cat crawling out from underneath the bed.

The troll jumped back and scratched his head in wonder. How could this be? How could something made from a piece of wood come alive? The troll reached down to the wooden cat. The cat purred and rubbed against the troll’s arm. After that, the troll talked to the cat about everything, and the cat would listen. One day it occurred to the troll, “if I can make this wooden cat come alive, I could do it again.” So, he went back to carving. He made foxes, raccoons, and many other animals. They all became his friends.

Finally, the troll began to work on a little bird, a sparrow. As he worked, he made a mistake while carving the bird’s wings. When the bird came to life, it hopped around just fine. When it tried to fly though, the bird rose up slightly and then fell back down on its sides, wobbling back to its feet. Though not able to fly, the bird was not angry with the troll. It spent days playing with its wooden friends, singing, holding conversations with the troll, happy to be alive. Each day went by fast, and at night everyone slept peacefully.

One late summer night, lightning crackled into the dry forest. The lightning struck many trees, and only a quick rain shower followed the lightning show. Luckily the troll and all the animals slept cozy and dry inside of the cave, safe from the furious lightning and raindrops. By dawn, much of the forest turned to ashes as lightning fires spread. As the troll rose from his bed, he smelled something strange. He got up and very quietly tiptoed to his kitchen, not wanting to wake his friends. As he went down the hall, he realized the smell came from the doorway. The troll opened the door and saw thick smoke rising above flames, only about a mile away, coming toward him. He didn’t know what to do. He needed to get his friends out fast. All the other animals in the forest ran toward him as fast as their legs could carry them.

Swiftly, the troll woke all his wooden animal friends and got them on their feet. He left the cave with them in great haste. As they ran away from the fire and smoke, some other animals stopped them and laughed. They mocked the troll and the lumbering way he ran. They called him names and stared at the strange party he carried and those following him.

“Why are you following this hideous creature?” asked a deer.

“Because he made us,” one of the wooden animals

replied.

“So,” said the deer. “He’s green, slow, he walks with pounding footsteps, he’s covered with warts, and his feet are ridiculously large. You may come with us. Leave this disgusting thing behind!”

The wooden animals murmured amongst themselves. The wooden animals decided the troll was not really that great. They wanted to go with the other animals of the forest, where they wouldn’t be made fun of. All of the wooden animals said they would join the real animals except for the little sparrow, who protested, saying the troll was their friend. The other wooden animals ignored the little sparrow and followed the real animals away from the fire. Only the little sparrow stayed with the troll. The troll held the little sparrow in his hands and whispered to it, “thank you for staying.”

The troll ran as fast as he could, being very careful not to drop the delicate little bird. The wooden animals ran twice as fast as the troll and felt superior now that they were with the real forest animals. The fire came closer and closer to the troll and sparrow while the troll tired from his awkward running. As the troll slowed, the rest of the wooden animals picked up the pace, feeling free. But just as they enjoyed their new speed, the small cat, the first wooden animal made by the troll, felt pain in its legs, tail, and head as if needles punctured them. Its legs slowed and then the cat stopped moving. One by one, the rest of the animals stopped moving. They stiffened and turned back to a pile of lifeless pieces of wood.

At the same time, the weary troll slowed to a walk until he looked at the little bird he held. The little bird looked at him with trust, and the troll resumed running because of his little friend, a real friend who did not abandon him. The troll used his wits and familiarity with the countryside to turn downhill towards the river. He clutched the sparrow tight, not wanting to drop it as he huffed and puffed. The troll made it to the river, hopped in a small boat and paddled to the middle of the wide river as the fire spread behind him. The other wooden animals couldn’t do anything. They couldn’t run, they couldn’t call out for help. The fire roared closer and closer and then reached the other wooden animals, turning them into ashes.

The little sparrow and troll made their escape across the river, and there they found a new cave, built a new bed, made a new kitchen, and this time the troll added a little nest for his friend. The bird sang to the troll, and the troll cared for the bird. The two friends stayed together, grateful for each other, and lived happy lives.



Paula Martinson



## Sunlight Rays Keep the Glow

By Indrė Tijūnelis

The Sunlight Orphan Aid Co-chair Daina Siliūnienė, Advisor Indrė Tijūnelienė, and Co-chair Lina Smilgienė.

The Sunlight Orphan Aid for Lithuania (Lietuvos vaiku globos būrelis "Saulutė") began in the spring of 1993 as a committee of the Lithuanian World Community, Inc. (PLB). In 2007 it registered as a separate, not-for-profit charity organization. The objective was to help needy children in Lithuania, especially orphans and children who were placed in "children's homes" because their parents' rights were terminated. On TV we had seen videos of the dire neglect found in orphanages in Yugoslavia, and we wondered what the conditions were in similar places in Lithuania after 50 years of brutal occupation by Soviet Russia after the secret Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, which locked Lithuania away from the Western world by the Iron Curtain.

After visiting Lithuania, we were pleased to find the conditions were better in Lithuania than in Yugoslavia, yet additional assistance was strongly needed. Having roots in both Lithuania and America, I felt an urgency to help.

I was born in Lithuania in October 1939. My mother was born in Chicago and through her, I was also a USA citizen. Our family left Lithuania in 1944 to escape from the German Nazi and Soviet terror, which descended on

the country. Everyone thought it was a temporary move, but it turned out to be different. Lithuania was no longer on the map. It was incorporated into a big red Soviet bloc. After three years in a Displaced Persons Camp in Germany, in 1947 we emigrated to America.

I grew up in Chicago, where many of my mother's relatives still lived since their arrival in about 1903. Some had businesses in the Bridgeport area with the beautiful St. George's Church, where my mother was baptized. We always knew that we were advocates in the Western world for the reestablishment of Lithuanian independence, since Lithuania's voice was silenced by the Iron Curtain.

When we arrived in Chicago, our relatives already had businesses and other enterprises. In the Bridgeport area, on Halsted Street, uncle Joe Spaitis had a butcher shop (meat store), which he called bučernė, and a very modern store to sell aluminum framed windows. On the corner of Halsted and Lituanica was the Malela electrical shop. Joseph Spaitis had a large tract of land in the Willowbrook area. It is said that the lovely ghost of Mary wanders around there at night. Al Capone ran his bootlegging operations in this area. Mrs. Gedmin, my maternal

grandmother's sister had a beautiful grey car, and a large plot of land, which is now 95th and Ashland. I think she grew corn on part of it; aromatic lilac trees dotted part of the periphery, and her son's, my uncle Ed's, used car lot occupied part of her property. Uncle Ed was a colorful figure, telling stories about meeting Frank Sinatra and other celebrities in Las Vegas. His sister, my aunt Emma, the same name as my mother's, was married to Mr. Kosiak, who looked like Prince Phillip. They had two sons, Mikey and Joey, who were younger than my sister and I. When we went out to play in the unfenced yard, we were strongly cautioned not to open the large fenced enclosure, which housed several German Shepherds. Later, a baby sister Mary Ann came into the Kosiak family. When we lived in the 20th and Ashland, and Bridgeport areas, uncle Barney used to take us to Lemont, to picnics by Holy Villa, a senior living facility run by the Sisters of St. Casimir. Mrs. Gedmin knew the founder of the order, Mother Marija Kaupas, and the other nuns. Uncle Barney used to say to my mother: "Emily, buy land in Lemont." (Miliute, pirk žemės Lemonte.) Unfortunately, uncle Barney lost his life in a car accident.

I grew up in the Chicago area, married, taught high school science classes until the first of our four children started arriving, and, later did some substitute teaching. In general, I was a housewife. For a few years, we had a foster son, who subsequently went back to live with his

relatives. In all that time, I had not been back to Lithuania. Then my mother visited occupied Lithuania in 1976 with a tour group, followed by my father, then in 1978 my husband. In 1979, I went with our 4 children, and in 1980 I went alone. In those days the Soviets only allowed a five-day visit, and you could stay only in Vilnius or Kaunas. If the relatives wanted to meet you, they had to do so in one of those cities. Besides getting acquainted and touring, only with the assigned tour guide, there was no time to see anything else.

Consequently, after starting the Sunlight ("Saulutė") Committee for the Lithuanian World Community (PLB), I traveled to Lithuania in January of 1994 to acquaint myself with the conditions and situations surrounding children in need. I visited about 50 children's homes in various places and found that they were large facilities with about 200 children. Some facilities were in conjunction with the parish church, some were family-like settings where a person is hired to be the "father" or "mother" to about 4 children. Some children were in foster homes. We decided to send packages of donated items to the larger homes (internatai) and shelters for abused mothers and their babies, but give financial aid to needy families recommended to us by our trustworthy local residents. We had concerts, lecture series, participated in our parish or craft fairs and accepted donations from individuals and various businesses. A very great help in



The Sunlight Orphan Aid Committee on March 2, 2020. First row, from left: Ramunė Račkauskienė, Aušra Saulienė, Indrė Tijūnėlienė, Raminta Marchertienė, and Marytė Černius. Second row, from left: Banė Kronienė, Laima Žliobienė, the late Eugenija Barškėtienė, Jūratė Mereckienė, Dalia Narienė, Daina Siliūnienė. Third row, from left: Ilona Didžbalis, Alė Lelienė, Žibutė Pranckevičienė, Lina Smilgienė, Rita Pasile, Faustina Varaneckienė, and Daina Siliūnienė.



procuring donations was nurse anesthetist Ginger Houghton and lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force Bob Duda, who discovered his Lithuanian roots. They also worked with the US National Guard and were residents of the eastern part of the USA. Sister Dorothy Dempsey of St. Patrick's parish in St. Charles, Illinois was invaluable. She organized that on the third Sunday of every month parishioners could bring their donated items to a parish hall, and our volunteers would pick them up, bring them to the Lithuanian center where they would be sorted, packaged, and sent out to Lithuania.

However, time flies, and we are not getting younger. We considered closing the organization. Lithuania has won its independence, was the first to break up the Soviet Union thirty years ago, but families with various needs are everywhere. We were so happy to find out, that Daina Siliūnas and Lina Smilgienė asked their friends, several of which had helped us prepare for our parish Christmas bazaar by baking holiday cookies, or making traditional Christmas tree straw ornaments if they would like to join "Saulutė" on a permanent basis. Many answered in the affirmative.

On February 29, 2020, a meeting was called at the Lisle, Illinois residence of Daina Siliūnas, where the present and new members met. The seniors talked about the history of "Saulutė" and their experiences working as volunteers (there are no salaried workers). The new members shared their plans for future activities. Now there are new officers for the Sunlight Orphan Aid: Co-chairs, Lina Smilgienė and Daina Siliūnas; treasurer Ramunė Račkauskas; secretaries, Laima Braune, Birutė Nalis, and Ilona Didžbalis; website coordinator, Dalia Naris; Sponsor a Child Program chair, Daiva Kisielius; event planners, Faustina Varaneckas and Judy Sidrys; liaison with Lithuania, Daiva Majauskas. New members are Rita Pasile, Lina Žlioba, Alė Lelis, Vaiva Marchertas, and Žibutė Pranckevičius. Mary Kriaučiūnas has agreed to help coordinate the annual Christmas cookie decorating. Indrė Tijūnėlis will be an advisory to the co-chairs;

the senior members will remain and work together with the new members, who all happen to be of a younger generation. The Sunlight Orphan Aid for Lithuania encourages adopting or fostering children, integrating the handicapped into mainstream society, making as many places as possible handicapped accessible. Inquiries regarding the Sunlight Orphan Aid (Saulutė) can be directed to [dntsiliunas@aol.com](mailto:dntsiliunas@aol.com), tel. 630-852-3204. Donations can be sent to the previous address – 1133 Amber Drive, Lemont, IL 60439.

*Photos by Daiva Majauskienė.*



Children in Lithuania's rural neighborhoods were pleasantly surprised to receive the opportunity to continue their education remotely. Not having the means to purchase a computer, without which it would not be possible to do their schoolwork, the Sunlight Orphan Aid, along with the Lithuanian Children Foundation in Lithuania, provided them with computers.

# our community

## Colorado Lithuanian School Celebrated Its Two Years!

By Simona Bataitytė

On March 7, the Colorado Lithuanian School celebrated its second birthday! In class, we took some time off for fun, conversations and, of course, enjoying the birthday cake. We shared our memories of the work done in the past two years, of what we learned in class, of the events we participated in, and of how we made friends here and grew up together. After eating the cake, we hurried back to our classwork, thus starting the third year of school. We were all determined to celebrate our next year's birthday together.

On this day we also participated in the competition "Angel in Lithuanian Folk Art" organized by the LAC Board of Education.

We thank the school teachers, parents, and students for their work, being together and helping to grow the school community.



Colorado Lithuanian School's Second Birthday Cake.



Milda cutting angels for the competition "Angels in Lithuanian Folk Art".



Aras, Auste, and Sean make angels for the competition "Angels in Lithuanian Folk Art".



## Varškės Skarelės su Obuoliais

Farmer Cheese Cookies with Apples

By Jana Sirusaitė-Motivans



This is an unusual time that we are currently experiencing, filled with anxiety and uncertainty. When and how will this all end?

In times of stress, we seek comfort. The empty shelves in the grocery stores indicate that we are doing a lot of baking. Flour has become almost as elusive as toilet paper. I have plenty of flour and sugar, but I am keeping a nervous eye on my dwindling supply of baking soda and vanilla. Since I am home with my family, we are spending some quality time together baking. It seems many others are doing the same.

During my five years as food editor for Bridges, I managed to share most of my ideas and recipes with you but I have a few more tricks up my sleeve! Since I am at home and have some unexpected free time, I decided to do an encore and share a simple baking recipe.

Many years ago, when my children were too young to camp at Neringa, we all went to Family Camp together.

During one of these sessions, a counselor from Lithuania led a cooking class for the children. They made old-fashioned farm-style cookies, using two very traditional Lithuanian ingredients: varškė (farmer cheese) and obuoliai (apples). The campers made a soft dough, enriched with the cheese, rolled it flat, and cut it into squares. These squares were wrapped around apple slices, sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar, and baked. In Lithuanian these are called "skarelės", which means "scarves" because the triangular shape looks like the headscarves worn by many women in the countryside.

These rustic apple treats are not too sweet and actually even somewhat healthy thanks to the farmer cheese and apples. They could be eaten for breakfast with some yogurt, or for a snack with coffee or a glass of milk. This is a great family project while the kids are home. Take some time to bake together, and keep washing your hands!



## Varškės Skarelės su Obuoliais (Farmer Cheese Cookies with Apples)

### Ingredients

- 1 package farmer cheese (7 oz)
- 1 2/3 cups flour
- 1 stick plus 1 tbsp. butter, room temperature
- 3 tbsps. sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 3 apples
- TOPPING: 5 tbsps. sugar mixed with 1 tsp. cinnamon

1. Pre-heat the oven to 350°



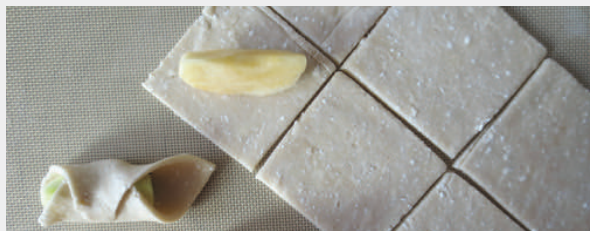
2. In a large bowl, use a fork to mix together the farmer cheese, softened butter, sugar and salt. Add vanilla. Gradually add the flour, mixing well. Use your hands to shape the dough into a ball. Put the dough into the refrigerator to chill while you prepare the apples.



3. Slice the apples into 8 pieces. Peel and core the slices.



4. Use a rolling pin to roll half the dough into a large circle. Trim the edges to form a square, approximately 9 x 9 inches. Use a small knife to cut the dough into 9 smaller squares (approx. 3 x 3 inches). Place one apple slice diagonally across a small square. Bring two corners of the dough together, overlapping, to cover the middle of the apple slice, leaving the remaining two corners of the slice exposed. Repeat for all 9 small squares. Place the dough-wrapped apple slices on a parchment-lined baking sheet, leaving space between them. Repeat with the remaining half of the dough, after including the trimmings from the first half.



5. Sprinkle the tops of the apples and dough with cinnamon sugar. Bake for 30 minutes or until golden brown. Let cool – the apples inside will be hot!



The original recipe in the Neringa family camp newsletter was very vague. I found this recipe on-line in a blog called "Lithuanian in the USA".

### Security

...The 2020 database of 38,000 men between 18-23 years was used by a computer program to randomly select 3,828 conscripts for a 9-month tour of duty throughout various units in Lithuania. The list is available at <https://sauktiniai.karys.lt>. Students can request postponement until the end of their studies. Men and women between 18-38 years can still volunteer for enlistment.

...Lithuania and Poland have joined in a bilateral Defense Ministers Council to train and work together for the defense of Suwalki Gap and affiliate the Lithuanian Mechanized Iron Wolf Infantry Brigade and the Polish 15th Mechanized Brigade. The Suwalki Gap is a 60 mile (104 km) border between Lithuania and Poland which separates Russia's Kaliningrad region and Belarus. The Gap is the only land corridor in which NATO troops could move through Poland to reinforce the Baltic Nations in the event of a conflict with Russia. The Rail Baltica passes through the Gap linking Bialystok, Poland, and Kaunas and will go eventually to Tallinn. They also agreed to seek more United States military presence in the region.

...The first multilateral rotation of the Cyber Rapid Response Team (CRRT) developed by Lithuania is on standby replacing the Dutch-led CRRT. The team consists of 6-8 cybersecurity experts from Lithuania, Poland, Netherlands, and Romania and is one of the 47 projects approved under the Council of the European Union Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) under the 2007 Treaty of Lisbon.

...The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg has rejected a complaint by 4 members of a Russian state-controlled TV channel, Rossiya-24, regarding their 2016 expulsion from Lithuania. They tried to cover the Vilnius Russia Forum co-organized by the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry and attended by critics of Russian President Vladimir Putin. The Russian team did not have accreditation and they were accused of aggressive attacks and provocation by the police and local media. A Rossiya-24 team in Ukraine in 2014 demonstrated flagrant lies and disinformation which led to failed attempts to expel them blocked by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The Lithuanian Migration Department with information from the Lithuanian Security Services found that the 4 men posed a threat to national security and ordered them deported and banned each from entering Lithuania for a year. The Rossiya 4 had appealed their expulsion to the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court and the Supreme Administrative Court but these appeals were rejected and they eventually peti-

tioned the Human Rights court in Strasbourg where their appeal was also rejected.

...The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, accused Russia of pressuring his country to merge with Russia by cutting off the supply of oil after December 31, 2019. Belarus relies on Russian for more than 80% of its gas and oil. It has received oil from Norway and Iran by way of the oil terminal at Klaipeda, Lithuania and is negotiating for additional supplies from the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Over the last 3 years, Klaipeda Oil has invested 45 million Euros for new storage facilities for crude oil deliveries. Belarus imports about 18 million tons of oil a year from Russia; LG Cargo of Lithuanian Railways said that they can carry up to 3 million tons. Belarus shares a 422 mile (679 km) border with Lithuania and a 107 mile (173 km) border with Latvia.

...Sputnik, the Russian media organization, has closed its rented Tallinn office with 35 Estonian employees in the face of Estonian banks not accepting Sputnik salary transfers. The Sputnik Estonia website, which reports in Russian and Estonian, plans to continue to operate.

...The two-day 13th annual Snow Meeting was held in Trakai with 100 diplomats, advisors, and experts from research centers, and parliamentarians from 15 countries, NATO and European Union agencies. Participants in the informal meeting included Latvia's Defense Minister, the Foreign Ministers of Poland and Slovakia and the U.S. Assistant Secretaries of State and Defense. The Lithuanian Foreign Ministry press release stated, "This year, the focus will be on strengthening the transatlantic link, on the roles of Russia and China in the current geopolitical context, and NATO's Euro-Atlantic security enhancement goals".

...NBC Security of Great Falls, Virginia will begin operations in Kaunas under the name UAB Baltic Defense Industries and recruit up to 30 people over the next 3 years. It provides military, law enforcement, and defense support in the U.S., Algeria, Ukraine, and Saudi Arabia. It will work with the Kaunas University of Technology in the recruitment of specialists and interns in mechanical and electrical engineering, cyber specialties, aviation and aeronautics, artificial intelligence, military, and defense technologies.

...IT News reports that the Lithuanian Ministry of Defense and the State Security Department intelligence agency (VSD) warned in its 2020 National Security Threat Assessment that many Lithuanian LinkedIn users have been targeted by fictitious Chinese companies to become "con-

## current events

sultants” or apply for employment with them. Targeted jobs include IT specialists, civil servants, defense sector employees, scientists, and experts in specific fields. Such LinkedIn accounts often have Western first names and Chinese surnames with fake photos and targets are asked to provide an assessment of public and non-public military and political information. The VSD warns that after interviews in local hotels, the Chinese offer payment in advance for consultancy services and confidential employment. The VSD said that China has overlapping strategic interests with Russia, and the two countries often coordinate military and intelligence operations.

...In response to the VSD Assessment, The Baltic News Service reports that the Chinese Embassy in Vilnius expressed strong disagreement with perceived threats in areas of investment, spying, cybersecurity, and military activities. It also claimed that “China never seeks military expansion and global dominance” yet noted that China resolutely defends its sovereignty and territorial integrity, upholding core interests on issues related to Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and the South China Sea and strongly resists “interfering in China’s internal affairs”. The VSD Assessment concluded that China is expanding its influence worldwide through its Belt and Road Initiative and economic leverage to ensure other countries support Beijing on key political matters.

...Lithuanian Colonel Remigijus Baltrėnas, head of the Second Investigation Department, who presented the 2020 National Security Threat Assessment said that Chinese telecommunications company, Huawei’s involvement in the development of the 5 G wireless network infrastructure poses a security risk and Darius Jauniškis, head of the VSD, said: “every sensible state should take those risk signs into account”.

...Estonia’s annual security assessment said that although Russia is the main security threat in 2020, it does not anticipate an attack. It noted that Russia has deployed short-range ballistic Iskander missiles 120 km (75 miles) from the Estonian border and 45 km (27 miles) from the Lithuanian border. It noted that the 18,000 ground and airborne Russian troops and associated offensive equipment give “absolute supremacy” versus NATO forces in the Baltic region.

...The U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania, Robert Gilchrist, visited the 500 strong U.S. 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry from Fort Hood, Texas at Lithuania’s Pabradė Training Area near Belarus for a Combined Arms Live-Fire Exercise (CALFEX) which included 30 M1A2 Abrams tanks, 25

Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles, and 70 wheeled vehicles. The culmination of the CALFEX was a large-scale display of combined forces doing the strategic firing, moving downrange, with a final dismounted engagement with an “enemy”.

...The U.S. Department of Defense has informally notified Congress of its plans to provide \$125 million in new military assistance to Ukraine which includes counter-artillery radars and armed Mark VI patrol boats. These boats are meant to counter Russia’s naval actions which in 2018 when it captured 3 Ukrainian vessels and 24 Ukrainian sailors in the Kerch Strait which connects the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. This assistance is the first installment of \$250 million Ukrainian Security Assistance appropriation.

...Russian backed “militants” bombarded a Ukrainian observation post in Donbas with heavy 152 mm howitzers followed by assault teams from three directions which killed one Ukrainian, a 22-year old grenade launcher operator. After the Ukrainians retreated they delivered a return artillery strike which killed 4 militants and the Russians, in turn, abandoned the observation post. Since 2014 the war in eastern Ukraine has claimed over 13,000 lives.

...Per the Open Skies Treaty, member states of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) can fly over other members’ military installations. Observers from the U.S., Estonia, and Lithuania observed military infrastructures in Russia and Belarus using a Saab 340B twin-engine turboprop from Sweden equipped with a vertical optical panoramic camera. They followed a flight path from Kubinka-Belarus-Kaliningrad and a separate flight above Kaliningrad. The observers were in turn observed by Russian observers.

### Business

...The New Year brought about a minimum gross monthly salary rise from 555 Euros to 607 Euros (+9.4%). The minimum hourly wage increases from 3.39 euros to 3.72 euros (+9.7%). Mandatory per diem payment is paid to all employees who are sent on a business trip within or outside Lithuania. Even when all business-related expenses are reimbursed, the employer is obligated to pay a per diem supplement which may or not be fully taxed.

...In response to the recent increase in business taxes and lack of progress on structural reforms in the public sector, major business organizations have withdrawn from an October 2017 agreement on reforms. The Lithuanian Business Confederation, the Lithuanian Chamber of Commerce Industry and Crafts, the Lithuanian Employers’



Confederation, the Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists, and the Investor's Forum issued a statement reading in part, "The ruling majority and government has not implemented structural reforms in the public sector (the school network, university merger, healthcare reforms, etc.) and has taken the easiest way of raising taxes. We consider such a policy to be short-sighted and taking the wrong way."

...Waltham, MA-based Rocket Software has opened a new development center in Vilnius and plans to hire more than 200 engineers and programmers in the next 2-3 years. Founded in 1990 Rocket now has 1500 "Rocketeers" worldwide and specializes in IBM Z Systems, power systems, analytics, networks, database, and connectivity to enable its client companies to use open source, cloud, and artificial intelligence. Rocket has 7 locations in the U.S., 7 in Europe, 3 in Australia, and 2 each in China, India, and Japan.

...The credit rating company, Moody's, will contribute 200,000 Euros to the ISM Foundation which supports talented students at the ISM University of Management and Economics via the 100 Talent Scholarship program. They are also establishing the Moody's Lab at ISM University to conduct research on corporate, industry, and country ratings and gain access to Moody's public website for their published reports and rating methodologies, as well as access to specialized databases. ISM University was founded in 1999 in Kaunas but is now located in a former 14th-century Bazillion monastery in Vilnius. With 1800 undergraduates in 6 programs, it also has 3 graduate programs, 9 business programs, and an Executive Studies Program.

...The Seimas voted on fines for retailers who provide free plastic bags thicker than 15 microns as amendments to the Law on Environmental Protection. Although prohibited since January 1, 2019, the fines of 1,000 to 3,000 Euros were just implemented and could go to 5,000 Euros for repeat violations. In reality, Lithuanians use about 7 times more ultra-lightweight bags than the ones subject to the fines (226 vs. 34 per inhabitant in 2017).

...In 2018 Lithuania became an Associate Member State of CERN, the world's largest nuclear and particle physics laboratory, located in Switzerland. The Lithuanian Innovation Center and two technology parks are inviting companies to apply for up to 40,000 Euros to develop products using CERN technologies via the Lithuanian Business Incubation Center. Candidate technologies for technology transfer include particle accelerators, vacuum

technology, sensors, detectors, superconducting magnets, engineering, and data sciences. The annual selection process will occur in two phases. In the first phase, participants write a preliminary business plan, highlighting the need for technological or know-how support from CERN. Up to 5 proposals will enter the second phase where participants will write a comprehensive business plan of which up to 3 proposals will be awarded financial and other support. The Authorized Project Coordinator at the Lithuanian Innovation Center is Adomas Jelinskas at a.jelinskas@lic.lt.

...Lithuania has a total wind power capacity of 533 MW of which 480 MW comes from large utility-scale plants. Throughout 2019 Lithuania produced 1.453 TWh of electricity, a new record 28% higher than produced in 2018 and contributed to 13% of Lithuania's electricity consumption. In 2018 Lithuania set a goal for its national energy strategy to provide 100% renewable energy by 2050, i.e. 18 TWh. The first zero-subsidy wind farm has just been approved – the 75 MW Akmenė One project near Akmenė in northern Lithuania is projected to supply 300 GWh under a 12-year contract. The fifteen 5 MW wind turbines are expected to be constructed in mid-2020 with completion expected within a year. Subsequent projects are expected to bring the Akmenė complex up to 400 MW capacity.

...In 2019 Metso of Finland opened a Business Services center in Vilnius which now employs 80 specialists in finance and customer logistics. In 2020 it plans on opening a Minerals Consumables business by establishing a rubber and poly-met wear parts manufacturing facility in Siauliai, in northern Lithuania. By the end of the year, they estimate that it will also employ 80 people. The rubber-metal materials are used in the natural resource logistics of mining, aggregates, recycling, and process industries. Metso serves customers in Europe, Russia, Middle East, and Africa with a workforce of over 15,000 with sales of 3.6 billion Euros in 2019.

...Some funds of Ūkio Bankas looted of \$45 million by Vladimir Romanov, may be clawed back by Lithuanian authorities by a recovery of \$27.5 million garnered by the sale of London property bought with the misappropriated funds. The theft and 2013 collapse of Lithuania's sixth-largest bank, is documented in the 2017 "Paradise Papers" and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project. Romanov fled to Russia where he was given asylum and remains.

...Unity Technologies, a leader in real-time development platform for virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and

## current events

3D gaming announced plans to add 50 specialists to its Vilnius office. Current users of the platform include Disney, Microsoft, Electronic Arts, NASA, and Warner Bros. The Unity game engine is used in over 50% of all mobile games worldwide and is installed on 3 billion unique devices and behind 60% of all AR/VR and interactive content. Unity was founded in Copenhagen in 2004 by three partners and their first hire was a Lithuanian software engineer. Of 2800 employees in 27 locations worldwide, 120 currently work in Vilnius and Kaunas. In 2019 the projected value of the company was \$6.2 billion and an IPO is anticipated. Future work includes self-driving vehicles, architectural, engineering, and construction applications; as well as artificial intelligence (AI) solutions that simulate real-world problems.

...Another AI firm that is expanding in Lithuania is U.K. based Satalia which acquired the Kaunas-based IT company- Data Dog. Over the next two years, the company plans to hire up to 50 new employees for its R&D projects. The company is looking for Java software engineers, QA engineers, DevOps engineers, project managers, data scientists, machine learning engineers, and various administrative positions. One past project for Tesco, a major U.K. retailer, was logistic routing optimization which saved them over 11 million miles of travel last year.

### General

...For the first time in 28 years, Lithuania's population increased by 145 people to 2,794,300!!! The number of people emigrating exceeded those immigrating by 10,800. More than half of the arrivals (40,100) were Lithuanian citizens (20,400) with the rest mainly Ukrainians (8,900) and Belarusians (6,400). The natural population growth was still negative 10,700 with 27,700 births and 38,400 deaths. In 2018 Lithuania's population declined by 14,900.

...According to the Lithuanian Road Police Service, 184 people were killed in car accidents in 2019. This is 11 more than in 2018. There were over 8,000 alcohol DUI arrests in 2019. Lithuania's Police Commissioner-General Renatas Požėla called for strengthening cooperation between the state's institutions, enhancing the role of traffic police, and tightening penalties for serious traffic violations.

...On January 11 an annual 9 km "tribute run" through the streets of Vilnius is held in honor of the 15 freedom defenders who lost their lives on January 13, 1991. Approximately 8,165 people from 23 countries and a variety of groups participated in the run including 3,000 from the Lithuanian Armed Forces, personnel from the

U.S. Embassy, and allied soldiers deployed in Lithuania. About 800 runners remotely joined the event in 11 countries including Afghanistan, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Mali, Netherlands, U.S., U. K., Spain, and Switzerland.

...President Gitanas Nausėda has proposed to amend the Law on Intelligence to permit the State Security Department (SSD) to summon people to headquarters for "preventive conversations". If approved it would enable the SSD to inquire why someone would be discontent with the policies of the President, an ally (the U.S.), international conflicts, and any Government decision. The amendment would also enable the SSD to use pre-emptive measures against perceived threats and protect against disclosing information regarding SSD members and their families. Darius Kuolys, former Minister of Culture and Education (1990-1992) and Director of the Civil Society Institute criticized the proposal saying "It seems we are behaving like in a totalitarian state. We simply leave our intelligence services out of bounds of any discussion or criticism. This is a sign of a not free society." Gabrielius Landsbergis, leader of the opposition Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats agrees with the proposal because "with ever-growing all sorts of threats from Russia and Belarus as well as China's growing activity" but would add the safeguard of an intelligence "ombudsman".

...The Lithuanian government has declared 2020, "the year of Chiune Sugihara", a Japanese diplomat stationed in Kaunas who saved about 6,000 Jews during World War II by helping them escape the Nazis by providing transit visas to Japan. In his honor, a monument was erected in Kaunas, and a photo exhibition is presented in the Seimas, plus concerts, conferences, films, and issued a postage stamp in his honor. Declassified records indicate that his 1939 cover to open a consulate in Kaunas (where there were no Japanese) was to gather intelligence on Nazi intentions via observations of Nazi troop movements and contact with Polish spies and refugees who were also fleeing Soviet repression. During July and August 1940 he wrote 2,129 transit visas in defiance of the Japanese government's instructions.

...The fourth "Together until We Win" concert was held on Freedom Defenders' Day, January 13, and collected 123,000 Euros in support of the rehabilitation of Ukrainian troops in Lithuania, financial support of Ukrainian Armed Forces and humanitarian assistance to people in the war-torn regions of Ukraine. An additional 9,100 Euros were donated on the Blue Yellow website. Eleven Ukrainian citizens were awarded commemorative medals for their



activities helping defend Lithuanian state buildings during January-September 1991.

...The Lithuania Seimas has legalized some alternative medicines beginning in 2021. The law will legalize activities covering recreational, natural, and popular medicine including dolphin therapy, leech therapy, and canine therapy. People providing such services may need special education including medicine, pharmaceuticals, nursing, and educology (e.g., education project management).

...Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis has formed a special working group to erect a monument in Vilnius to President Antanas Smetona, Lithuania's first elected president 1919-1920 and later an authoritarian president after a coup d'état 1926-1940. He escaped from Lithuania just ahead of the Soviet occupation in June 1940 and made his way to the U.S. via Germany, Switzerland, Lisbon, and Brazil. In the U. S. he resided in New York, Washington - D.C., Pittsburgh, Chicago, and Cleveland. He was killed in a fire in his son's home in Cleveland in 1944. In 1975 his remains were moved from Cleveland's Knollwood Cemetery to All Souls Cemetery in Chardon, Ohio.

...The good news is that Lithuania's suicide rate of 24.4 deaths per 100,000 population in 2017 is lower than the 31.9 per 100,000 in 2013; the bad news is that it is still the world's highest rate according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. In 2015 hundreds lay down in Cathedral Square to protest the lack of progress in fighting suicide. In 2016 the mental health center established a new department of suicide prevention and Vilnius started its first comprehensive suicide strategy. There are now policies to decrease alcohol consumption. There are now changes in attitude that recognize depression as an illness. The Latvian director of a suicide prevention clinic expressed that "During the Soviet time, people who opposed the system were often put in psychiatric clinics. That's one of the reasons why people at risk are still reluctant to seek help."

...Lithuanians, Poles, and Latvians living in England have been scammed by offers on Facebook to sell goods on eBay only to learn that the goods were stolen and they then receive chargebacks and at risk of prosecution for charges of fraud and money laundering. The fraudulent offers, written in native languages, are being investigated by the British Eastern Region Special Operations Unit which warned "We're asking people to be aware of this scam and not sell items through their eBay accounts or make payments of receive funds through their PayPal accounts as a result of responding to online posts. Please

remember that if something seems too good to be true – such as the possibility of earning quick money from home – then it probably is."

...Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have agreed to not import energy from the nuclear power plant being built at Astravets, Belarus, not far from the Lithuanian border. The Lithuanian Seimas is concerned about the safety of the project and has authorized the purchase of 4 million iodine pills for distribution to its citizens. Two reactors are scheduled to be online in 2020 and two additional reactors are planned by 2025. The facility is being built by Russian contractors overseen by Rosatom, the Russian state nuclear energy company. Partial financing is supported by the Russian government and cost estimates are around \$25 billion. Currently, the three Baltic nations, Belarus, and Russia are linked with the BRELL, energy transmission network but the Baltic nations plan to withdraw from BRELL and synchronize their power grids with the rest of Europe in the next five years.

...The Lithuanian National Drama Theater has canceled its planned 1 month-long tour of 5 Chinese cities due to the COVID-19 outbreak. They had planned to present the play Lokis, about a trickster and clever jester from Nordic mythology. In 2018 the play was presented in Torun(Poland), Warsaw, and Madrid. Some of the performances were already sold out for the venues in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Quanzhou, and the port city of Xiamen. In previous tours of these cities, the company has noticed that some ardent fans follow them from city to city.

...In another fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, in the 2020 Eurovision Song Contest, Lithuania was to be represented by the group, The Roop and their song, "On Fire". Eight groups vied for the honor with The Roop winning both the jury vote and public vote. The competition took place in the Žalgiris Arena in Kaunas on Feb. 15 and broadcast on public broadcaster Lithuanian National Radio and Television, LRT. The contest has been canceled because of COVID-19 but the performance (in English) is available on YouTube as had been seen by over 5 million viewers.



Dear Bridges Readers and Subscribers,

The Lithuanian American Community (LAC) has been publishing "Bridges" magazine since 1977. The magazine has stories about Lithuanian American activities, history, culture, as hopefully acts as a bridge between the many diasporas of Lithuanians in America. We also have stories and about life in Lithuania. We design the magazine with many high-quality photographs, and print on good paper stock, for an enjoyable reading experience. Unfortunately, our costs to produce this magazine are continuously increasing, and we need to adjust our subscription costs to be able to continue bringing you a quality product. Starting this month, we reluctantly need to raise the cost of a yearly subscription to \$40/year and \$75/2-year for a print subscription and to \$30/year for an e-subscription. We hope that this small increase in subscription rates can be absorbed by all.

I would also like to promote the e-subscription feature of Bridges. LAC has introduced a newly designed web site at [lithuanian-american.org](http://lithuanian-american.org), which features a new layout, many more links than before and a trove of information about our LAC activities. Soon, all print and e-subscribers to Bridges will be able to access the current edition of Bridges through the website. The subscriber will have to register for access to the archive. There is subscription information directing payment options either by check and mail, or by PayPal.

Finally, we welcome your suggestions to help us improve Bridges and encourage submission of stories or ideas for stories. As part of the Lithuanian American community we hope that you continue enjoying Bridges.

Sincerely,  
Marius Naris  
Bridges Administration  
[spauda@javlb.org](mailto:spauda@javlb.org)



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