

# bridges



LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

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July/August 2021

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LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN  
NEWS JOURNAL

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**Front Cover:** Lithuanian Americans celebrate the Sixth of July, Lithuanian Statehood Day

**Back Cover:** Lithuanian ambassador to the United States Audra Plepytė and embassy staff holding the Lithuanian American Community 70th Anniversary flag outside the Lithuanian embassy in Washington, DC

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## from the editor

Dear readers,

As I am sure we all know, the Lithuanian American Community was founded in New York in 1951. This year, the organization is celebrating its 70th anniversary.

The Lithuanian American Community unites us all, Lithuanian Americans, members of our families, and everyone who cares about the preservation of the Lithuanian heritage, culture, and traditions. As an organization, the Lithuanian American Community fosters Lithuanian education, youth, sports, and civic organizations as well as maintains close ties with Lithuania.

To mark the 70th anniversary, the Lithuanian American Community has arranged the travel of the LAC 70th anniversary flag throughout the United States, symbolically uniting all the districts and chapters of the organization. This year's events will culminate in a Gala Celebration at the Lithuanian World Center in Lemont, Illinois on September 11, 2021. Everyone is invited to attend.

However, as the Lithuanian American Community President Arvydas Urbonavičius notes in his address to the community, the organization would not be able to successfully celebrate its 70th anniversary and continue its mission without your support. If you would like to donate to the LAC, please see the sponsorship brochure at <https://javlb.org/70th/> or write to [ekonomika@javlb.org](mailto:ekonomika@javlb.org).

Sincerely,  
Karilė Vaitkutė  
Editor



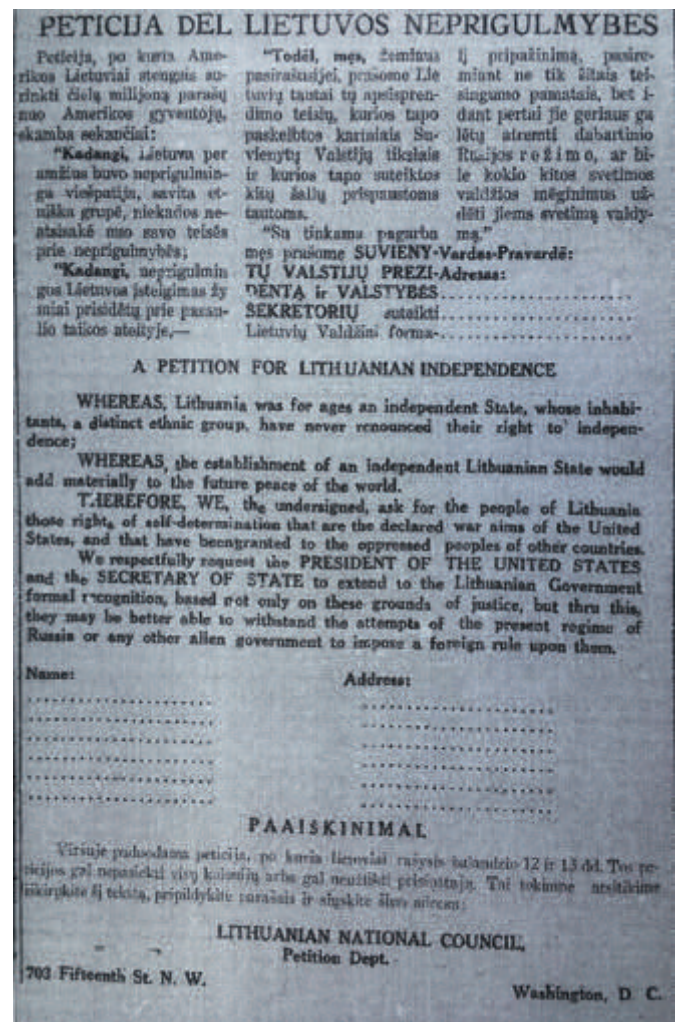
# One Million Signatures Accelerated the Recognition of Lithuania's Independence

Prof. Juozas Skirius  
Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania

On May 31, 1921, the Lithuanian delegation to Washington handed over a petition signed by one million signatures to the U. S. President Harding in Washington, DC. It is a unique event in the history of Lithuania, bearing in mind that one diaspora community was able to achieve such a result. True, there were other similar successful attempts during the 20th-century in Lithuania. The older generation of Lithuanians might remember that at the end of 1988, there was a protest organized by the Lithuanian Reform Movement (Lietuvos Persitvarkymo Sąjūdis) against the new draft of the USSR Constitution (amendments) initiated by the USSR Supreme Council that was unfavorable for Lithuania. In a relatively short time, about 1.8 million signatures were collected in Lithuania and sent to Moscow to Mikhail Gorbachev. (1) Another event, practically unknown to the Lithuanian people, was the efforts of the Catholic international organization called Tradition, Family, Property (TFP). Three decades ago, in 1990, in just four months, the TFP collected 5.2 million signatures worldwide (on five continents) for the restoration of an independent Lithuanian state. (2) In 1944 and 1990, Lithuanians in the United States tried to collect a million signatures, but those attempts were unsuccessful. When numbering in the hundreds of thousands and millions, signatures have an impact on governments of democracies, especially the United States, influencing their decisions.

After the First World War, when an independent Lithuanian state was being established, its politicians received full support from the diaspora, primarily Lithuanians in the United States. No one knows exactly how many Lithuanians lived in America at that time. It is estimated that the number might have reached up to half a million. It was a well-organized and prosperous enough community. Lithuanian American organizations collected monetary donations, carried out wide-ranging, pro-Lithuanian propaganda among members of the U.S. government and the public. Thousands of Lithuanian Americans, having saved enough money, went back to Lithuania and worked for the benefit of their homeland.

To carry out political activities more effectively, in 1918, Lithuanian American Catholics and nationalists agreed to establish a joint Lithuanian American Executive Committee (hereinafter - EC) in Washington, DC. It has to be noted that one influential ideological current, namely Lithuanian American socialists, did not join the



A petition for Lithuanian independence as printed in Lithuanian American newspapers

Committee because, in their words, they did not support "Lithuania ruled by the rich". Socialists were in favor of a "socialist Lithuania ruled by the people themselves". The EC members were Tomas Norus-Naruševičius, Dr. Jonas Šliūpas, Fr. Jonas Žilius, Kazys Česnulis, Dr. Matas Vinikas, Balys Mastauskas, Leonardas Šimutis, Juozas Širvydas, and others. (3) They were writing articles to the press and requests and resolutions for the U.S. government and embassies of foreign countries in Washington, DC; they also tried to arrange meetings with senators, congressmen, and the U.S. State Department employees. The narrative always revolved around the emerging Lith-

uanian state and the desire to gain the recognition and support of the United States government. The EC maintained contacts with the representatives of the Lithuanian government, especially with the Lithuanian delegation at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919. Back in 1918, the Lithuanian government authorized the EC to temporarily represent Lithuania's interests in Washington, DC.

On February 12, 1919, the EC decided to submit a memorandum to the U.S. State Department requesting recognition of restored Lithuania and its interim government. It was explained in more detail why Lithuania should be recognized and what Lithuanians would like from the USA. The chairman of the Lithuanian delegation to the Peace Conference in Paris, prof. Augustinas Voldemaras, correctly predicted that the position of the U.S. government on the issue of Lithuania could be influenced by American citizens. Therefore, in his letter of February 11 to the EC, Volde-

maras addressed Lithuanian Americans, pointing out the importance of the current moment and asking his compatriots to "conduct a special campaign to acquaint Americans with the current affairs and wishes of Lithuania" (4). On March 18, at the EC meeting, it was acknowledged that so far American Lithuanians have not been able to raise the issue of Lithuania in the United States. Fr. Žilius stated that it was necessary to "extract the sympathy of the American public and put pressure on the representatives of the USA in Paris" (5) so that Lithuania, supported by the United States, be recognized at the Peace Conference. The EC decided to immediately launch a major campaign to collect one million signatures from the U.S. residents to strengthen propaganda work. Without any delay, an address to all American Lithuanians was printed in newspapers. It stated that "Lithuania's decisive hour has come. Those who hold dear the precious ideals of freedom for all nations and the right of the Lithuanian people to self-govern in the way their conscience and mind dictate [...] must support those who fight for their freedom and tell the free people of the world that they will not calm down and be satisfied with any order of nations if it does not give Lithuania its freedom and independence." Lithuanians were urged not only to sign themselves but also to ask people of other nationalities to sign because only "the voice of millions will be heard by the people of the

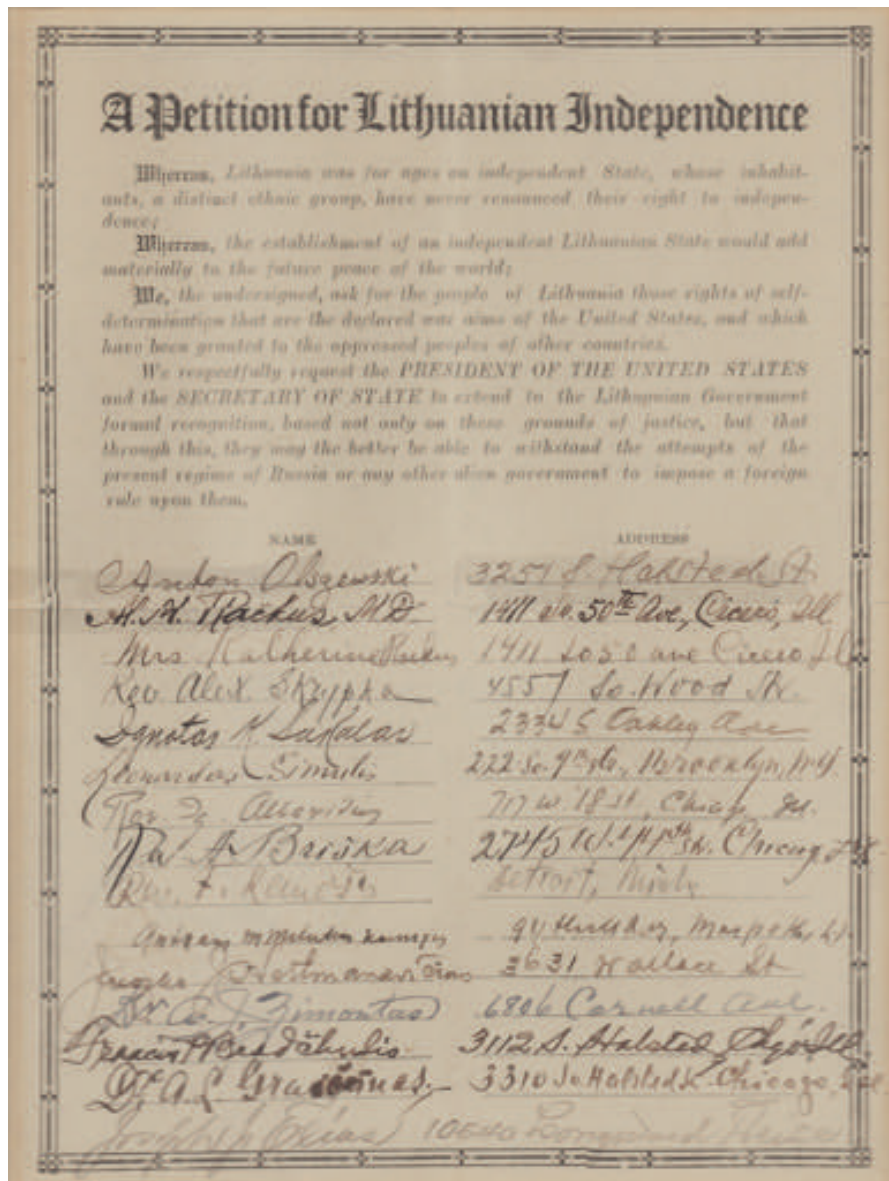
world" (6). The Executive Committee decided to set aside one day, April 12, for when all Lithuanian Americans and all friends of Lithuanians would sign the Petition to the United States President and Secretary of State. Signatures could still be collected the next day, April 13, and afterward, all signatures had to be presented to the Executive Committee in Washington, DC.

Signature collection commissions were established in Lithuanian colonies, and the EC was in charge of them. Starting April 5, Petition forms were being sent out to the Lithuanian communities. The EC recommended that if the commissions would not receive the forms in time, they should cut them out of Lithuanian newspapers, fill them out and send them. To facilitate the collection of signatures among other nationalities, the EC published half a million postcards with the map of the new European states, including Lithuania, and brief information about Lithuania in English. The postcards were sent together with the petition forms to Lithuanian colonies. (7) After the realization that the collection of so many signatures would be difficult to achieve in a few days, the EC decided to extend the collection until Easter and send the completed forms to the EC on April 21.

The Lithuanian American newspapers wrote about the collection of signatures and shared the stories of collectors from various Lithuanian colonies. Signature



Map indicating proposed boundary lines of the new states of Europe, published by the Lithuanian National Council in America



A petition page signed by Lithuanian Americans. Photo credit: Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture

collectors went from house to house explaining Lithuania's determination to be independent. People reacted in various ways. Some signed, while others refused and even badmouthed the collectors. (8) Rallies and demonstrations were held in support of the Petition. Lithuanian American socialists and Bolshevik Lithuanians did not support the Petition. They criticized signature collectors during joint Lithuanian events and spoke against the essence of the Petition (9). Nevertheless, efforts were made to collect as many signatures as possible from influential Americans (senators, congressmen, mayors, bishops, scholars, etc.). The Petition was signed by ordinary workers and office workers, also by people of the most diverse nationalities, such as Ukrainians, Jews, Armenians, and even Polish Americans. Historian Dr. Antanas

Kučas noted that "local newspapers praised American Lithuanian patriotism; speeches about Lithuania were said in Congress. It was a well-planned and cleverly conducted campaign that made Lithuania famous and stirred not only Lithuanian but also American public." (10) It was thanks to the collectors who bravely took it upon themselves to speak to people and collected hundreds of signatures.

The signature collection campaign did not end in April as planned. It continued for another six months. Scholar Remigijus Misiūnas noted that signatures were collected in 31 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and Canada. In Chicago, 43,526 signatures were collected; in Boston - 53,955, in Brooklyn - 40,354, in Cleveland - 39,806, in Newark - 19,583, in New Haven - 17,761, and in Philadelphia - 15,526. Organizers announced they had counted close to one million signatures. (11)

Lithuanian American activists decided to present the collected million signatures to the President of the United States at a more convenient time because the administration of Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat, was quite cold to the Lithuanian affairs. Republicans expressed clearer support for the Lithuanian campaign in the United States. In 1920, Warren G. Harding, a Republican, won the U.S. presidential election. His inaugura-

tion took place on March 4, 1921. Republican supporters of Lithuanians helped arrange a meeting with the new President with the purpose to present the Petition signed by a million Americans and remind the President of his promise to Lithuanians before the election. It was the second time that Lithuanian Americans had the opportunity to meet with the President of the United States.

Lithuanian American leaders and the EC decided to hold a Congress in Washington on May 30-31, 1921, during which they would discuss how they were going to present the signatures to the President. One hundred and forty-eight delegates came to Washington (Lithuanian American Socialists did not participate). At the congress, six men were elected to meet with the President. They were J.J. Elijošius, J. Hertmanavičius, A. Ivaškevičius-Ivas, Fr. J.



The Lithuanian American delegation with President Warren Harding. Photo credit: Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture

Jasaitis, J. Skritulskis, and Dr. Klimas, who was appointed keynote speaker. Five Latvians, four Estonians, Senator William J. King, Congressman V. M. Chandler, and Judge Aron J. Levy (Chairman of the Jewish Organization) joined the Lithuanian delegation. By the way, at the Congress, the representatives of the Catholic organizations questioned whether it was good that Latvians and Estonians were accompanying the Lithuanians. Jonas Vileišis, the first representative of Lithuania in the USA, explained to the Congress that most likely, the United States would recognize Lithuania only together with Latvia and Estonia (which turned out to be true). This explanation was enough to reassure the skeptics. (12)

At 10 a.m. on May 31, Congress delegates gathered near the White House. The signed petition forms were bound into 138 books and brought in an automobile adorned with American and Lithuanian flags. Members of the delegation brought the books into the White House. The delegation was received by President Warren Harding and Secretary of State Charles Hughes. Congressman Walter M. Chandler introduced the delegates and briefly spoke about the Lithuanian matter. After E. Klimas's speech and presentation of the Petition, the U.S. President acknowledged that the issue of Lithuania was very important and assured that it was being seriously discussed in the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee. (13)

The affairs of the Baltic States were brought into notice, and on July 28, 1922, the United States recognized Lithuania.

- 1 Lietuvos istorija. Sąjūdis: nuo „persitvarkymo“ iki kovo 11 – osios. Vilnius, 2008, t. 12, d. 1, p. 184-185.
- 2 Vytautas Sinica. Penki milijonai pamiirštų parašų už Lietuvos laisvę. [www.tiesos.lt/index.php/straipsnis/vytautas-sinica-penki-milijonai-pamiirstu-parasu-uz-lietuvos-laisve/](http://www.tiesos.lt/index.php/straipsnis/vytautas-sinica-penki-milijonai-pamiirstu-parasu-uz-lietuvos-laisve/)
- 3 Skirius J. JAV lietuvių darbai Lietuvai 1918-2018 metais. Vilnius: Savas takas, 2018, p. 35.
- 4 Skirius J. Lietuvos užatlantės diplomatija 1918-1929 metais: santykių su JAV politiniai ir ekonominiai aspektai. Vilnius, 1995, p. 29.
- 5 Skirius J. Lietuvos užatlantės diplomatija 1918-1929 metais: santykių su JAV politiniai ir ekonominiai aspektai. Vilnius, 1995, p. 30.
- 6 Tautiečiai. Lietuva. 1919, kovo 24, nr. 70, p. 1.
- 7 Atsišaukimas dėl Parašų Rinkimo. Lietuva. 1919, balandžio 7, nr. 82, p. 1.
- 8 Liulevičius V. Išeivijos vaidmuo nepriklausomos Lietuvos atkūrimo darbe. Chicago, 1981, p. 46.
- 9 Milijonas parašų Lietuvos valdžiai paremti. Bet Lietuvoj dabar yra dvi valdžios. Keleivis. 1919, balandžio 16, nr. 16, p. 2.
- 10 Amerikos lietuvių istorija. Red. dr. Antanas Kučas. Boston, 1971, p. 372-373.
- 11 Misiūnas R. Informacinių kovų kryžkelėse: JAV lietuvių informacinės kovos XIX a. pab.- 1922 m. Vilnius, 2004, p. 222.
- 12 Kaip Lietuviai Vežė Pericijas Prezidentui Harding 1921 m. Istorikas protokolas amerikiečių darbuotės už Lietuvos nepriklausomybę. Dirva. 1945, vasaris-kovas, nr. 5-10, p. 4.
- 13 Skirius J. JAV lietuvių darbai Lietuvai 1918-2018 metais. Vilnius: Savas takas, 2018, p. 60-61.



Julius Bielskis and Matas Vinikas standing by the bound sheets of the petition for Lithuanian independence signed by one million American



## WELCOME TO THE CITY OF BIG SHOULDERS

Tony Mankus

Chicago in 1970s

No one was here to greet me when I landed at Midway Airport on October 17, 1980. I didn't know anybody here. I HAD lived here briefly in the past, but that was more than twenty years ago, when I was only eighteen. It had been a post high school graduation sojourn that lasted for about a year. I didn't know anybody then either, other than some remote relatives. My connection to them was very tenuous and brief, and broke off as suddenly as it was made. So I had been as much a stranger here twenty years ago as I was now.

I picked up my suitcase at the luggage claim area and took a cab to the furnished apartment I had rented in the Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago. It was Friday afternoon when the cab dropped me off there, so I had the weekend to settle down and figure things out — reconnoiter the neighborhood, maybe. Since I was moving to Chicago, I would have to re-orient myself. What little I remembered from twenty years ago was probably irrelevant now.

But I didn't have to do it right away, I decided. For now, I just wanted to crash. It had been a long day. I plopped the suitcase and the extra handbag I had with me on to the bed and looked around the furnished apartment. It was basically a large, L-shaped room. The main area, which

was carpeted, had a sofa and a reclining easy chair facing the black and white portable TV that rested on a trolley cart. A kitchenette area, with a tiled floor, was off to the lower side of the L shape. It had a small stove, a refrigerator, some cabinets with dishes, cups, and silverware, together with a mini round table and a few chairs. There WAS a separate room for the bedroom, though - it even had a door.

It wasn't much of a place, I know, but I didn't care. My plan was to be here for a few weeks, or so, until I found something permanent. The main reasons I had rented it was that it was furnished, with a week-to-week lease, and it was close to an El stop. I needed a place close to public transportation since I didn't have a car yet. I was scheduled to start my new job in a few days, in downtown Chicago, and I needed a way to get there.

I stepped outside briefly to pick up a few essentials, including a sixpack of beer. I would tend to the unpacking, and other things, after a few brewskies, I told myself. A quick scan of the street gave me the impression that Rogers Park was a quasi-urban, quasi-residential area with a mixture of ethnicities. It had, among other things, lots of small businesses, like food stores, cleaners, clothing shops, and liquor stores to serve its transients, or



semi-transient residents like me. It didn't take very long to find what I was looking for.

Back in the apartment, I popped open a can of Miller Light, turned on the portable TV with the rabbit ear antennas, sat down in the reclining chair, and took a sip of the beer. The evening news was on one of the network channels with anchors Bill Kurtis and Walter Jacobson. The screen switched back and forth crisply between them as they reported news stories with urgent cadence, augmented with snippets of related videos. The national news portion had a lot of political stories, including the Presidential campaigns of Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter. Reagan was blaming Carter for his failure to free the American hostages after the Iranians overran the US Embassy in Tehran. The level of rhetoric between



Chicago in 1970s

them was heating up since Election Day was only a few weeks away. The local news portion included an update on Chicago boy John Wayne Gacy, the serial killer, Jacobson reminded the viewers, who had murdered thirty three of his sexual victims and had been sentenced to death earlier in the year.

The beer gave me a mild buzz after a few sips, just enough to ease up on the tightness in my shoulders. I had made the decision to move to Chicago, I told myself; so it wasn't like anybody had forced me to move here. I could've stayed and continued to work in Puerto Rico. I liked the tropical weather there, and the year-around tennis. I spoke Spanish easily, so communication wasn't a problem. Besides, most locals spoke English. I had also made a few friendly acquaintances there, including Margarita. She was single, attractive, and well educated — and I kind of liked her.

But I was conflicted. I didn't want to settle down there. I didn't feel like I belonged there. In all fairness to Puerto Rico, though, I didn't feel like I belonged ANYWHERE. My gypsy, refugee, immigrant existence for the last forty years had conditioned me to be on the move. Maybe Chicago was where I was meant to be, I told myself. I was forty one already and tired of bouncing around from place to place. It was time to plant some roots. Maybe I could make a fresh start here, leave behind all the moving around that led nowhere.

I tried to think of some positive things I knew about Chicago. In my high school English class in Elizabeth, N.J. we read and discussed the poem "Chicago," composed by

Carl Sandburg. He called Chicago a "City of Big Shoulders." That sounded good to me. The metaphor created an image of a city with blue collar, hard-working, no-nonsense people. In the worst case scenario — if things didn't work out for me here — I hoped that Chicago was caring enough that maybe Chicago's "big shoulders" would be of some comfort to me. Maybe the mild buzz from the can of beer made me feel a little more optimistic.

On Sunday I went to a local public library, looked up the full poem and reread it:

#### CHICAGO

*Hog Butcher for the World,  
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,  
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;  
Stormy, husky, brawling,  
City of the Big Shoulders:*

*They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have  
seen your painted women under the gas lamps luring the  
farm boys.*

*And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is  
true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again.  
And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the  
faces of women and children I have seen the marks of want-  
on hunger.*

*And having answered so I turn once more to those who  
sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer and  
say to them:*

*Come and show me another city with lifted head singing*

*so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.  
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job,  
here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities;*

*Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as  
a savage pitted against the wilderness,*

*Bareheaded,*

*Shoveling,*

*Wrecking,*

*Planning,*

*Building, breaking, rebuilding,*

*Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with  
white teeth,*

*Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young  
man laughs,*

*Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never  
lost a battle,*

*Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse,  
and under his ribs the heart of the people,*

*Laughing!*

*Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth,  
half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool  
Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight  
Handler to the Nation.*

My rereading of the poem confirmed what I remembered about Sandburg's image of Chicago being hard working, rough and tumble, and blue collar kind of town. It was also consistent with the experiences I had when I was here in 1957 and 1958. I was eighteen years old at the time and broke. I needed to make some money fast, so I took temporary jobs with Manpower, which included digging ditches, loading freight cars, etc.

Realistically, though, I doubted that Sandburg's romanticized, idealistic image of Chicago's blue collar worker "with lifted head singing so proud," and "fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action," and "under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white teeth," was accurate even in his time. I referenced "The Jungle," a contemporaneous book written by the author and muckraker Upton Sinclair. It went a long way to dispel those images and opened a Federal investigation which found that the "hog butcher to the world" was also the employer of poor and uneducated immigrants, including children, who worked for long hours at minimum wages in unsanitary and dangerous conditions.

Also the "hog butcher to the world" part wasn't there anymore. I found out that Chicago's Union Stock Yards, where the meatpacking industry had been centralized, closed completely by 1970. They were still here when I came to Chicago the first time. I had even thought about applying for a job there. But when I entered an office in the Union Stock Yards to fill out an application, the smell



The Magnificent Mile — Michigan Ave.

Photo: Bob Glander

Chicago's Magnificent Mile

was so bad that I turned around and left. I decided that I would rather dig ditches and load freight cars.

So I gave up on the idea of Chicago's big shoulders being of any comfort to me. I also decided it would be a stretch to think that Sandburg's image of Chicago, romanticized or not, was still relevant in 1980. A lot of water had flown under Chicago's and America's historical bridges in the past 75 years, including, among other things, two world wars, the so called Cold War with the Soviet Union, the Korean conflict, the Viet Nam war, etc. Chicago, and the world in general, had changed from Sandburg's innocent, idealistic world when America was growing and expanding, to one of large corporations, big government, impersonal anonymity and cutthroat competition. If you didn't have a good education, or the right family connections in the right social circles, it was a struggle for most people to make it beyond living from paycheck to paycheck.

At least that's how I saw it. So I dropped any wistful, beer-high hopes of easing into a genteel life here in Chicago. I hadn't lost all my sense of purpose and optimism yet, but they were starting to wear thin.



Tony Mankus is President of the law firm Mankus & Marchan, Ltd., located in the western suburbs of Chicago. Tony's literary background includes writing and publishing (in various legal journals) a number of technical articles dealing with tax and bankruptcy issues. He has also written a number of creative articles that were published in The Chicago Daily Law Bulletin, Lithuanian Heritage Magazine and Rivulets. Years ago he also wrote site reports as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador and edited "El Ecuador," a bilingual magazine there.

In 2013 Tony published a memoir, titled "Where Do I Belong?" dealing with his refugee and immigrant experiences in the U.S. In 2016 he published a fictional novella, called "Chicago Tango." Both are available on Amazon.com and Kindle, or through a link on his literary web site at: <http://www.tonymankus.com/>

# St. John's Day

Simona Grincevičienė



Participants of St. John's Day celebration

The Lithuanian community in Colorado is happy that people can finally get back to the usual activities and various events. Lithuanians in Colorado welcomed this year's summer on June 26 in a cozy Cherry Creek State Park campground in Aurora. Unusual heat waves have been surprising Lithuanians in Colorado since June. However, during St. John's Day, Lithuanians in Colorado were greeted by a Lithuanian type of weather! Lithuanians are very creative, and they are active even when strong winds blow and it rains. Dressed in warm clothes, the participants welcomed the summer celebration with tables set for a feast with various dishes, from pilaf to homemade cheese, to wonderfully tasting bread and various other snacks. After getting used to the pranks of the weather, participants started making St. John's wreaths. Flowers were provided by the Colorado Lithuanian School. Edita Buzėnienė, the Colorado Lithuanian School principal, organized fun games for children and adults, even though it was raining. A little later, after some rest and a delicious meal, we decorated T-shirts with fabric dye. The task was not easy but quite interesting! Later we lit a bonfire, listened to songs, and had fun talking to one another. We look forward to meeting you again soon at the next event!



St. John's Day



Making wreaths



Hand-decorated t-shirts



Ready for the fun activities



Lithuanian colors



Decorating t-shirts



Hand-decorated t-shirts

# Lithuania Brings Together Young Lithuanian Americans

Program participants share their stories



With Bring Together Lithuania participants in Klaipėda

## Simonas Bingelis

I was born in Kaunas, Lithuania in 1996. Until the age of five, I grew up in Garliava in a quaint brick home built by my grandfather. These early years were filled with amazing memories of picking strawberries from my grandmother's garden, running around the neighborhood with relatives, and traveling to the Palanga beaches in my family's "skifas", among many other adventures. Despite having an amazing early childhood, my parents were faced with an extremely difficult decision to potentially leave Lithuania for a faraway land called the United States of America. Through the visa lottery, my parents decided to leave behind a comfortable life in Lithuania to give my brother and me better opportunities on the other side of the ocean in Brick, New Jersey. This decision was not easy as my family left behind many loved ones and prepared themselves to enter the unknown.

The first few years in the US were very difficult for my family and me. Nevertheless, my parents instilled in me



Simonas Bingelis at the BTLT Versli Lietuva

the very core values of hard work, determination, and perseverance that have been the pillars by which Lithuanians have overcome the hardest of times for centuries. Using these values, I became one of the first people in my family to graduate from a university, while obtaining a

scholarship to play American football. I graduated with bachelor's degrees in Economics and Political science from Villanova University. In addition, I most recently obtained a master's degree in Business administration also from Villanova University.

Throughout my life in the US, I had only visited Lithuania a hand full of times. Thankfully, my parents always emphasized the importance of our Lithuanian identity, culture, language, and traditions. Despite living so far away from Lithuania, this emphasis allowed me to maintain a strong love for my roots, the Lithuanian language, and a desire to get a deeper understanding of all things Lithuania. This summer was the perfect opportunity to do just that. Having recently finished my studies, this was the first time in many years that I would have an entire summer to travel and rediscover myself. Visiting Lithuania was on the top of my list since it has been nearly 4 years since my last visit. Through the Lithuanian Foundation, I was chosen to participate in the Lithuanian Ambassador's Fund internship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Lithuania. Only after this did I get recommended by a family friend to also apply for the Bring Together Lithuania program. The timing of these two programs lined up nicely and I knew that if chosen, I would get a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to truly acquire a well-rounded and deeper understanding of Lithuania from all angles.

Prior to starting my application for the Bring Together Lithuania program, I did research on past years and the different events organized by the program leaders. I was very impressed by the variety of excursions, high-level meetings, and work experience organized by the organizers. I knew that it was something that I wanted to be a part of. Fast-track to today and I could not be happier that I was chosen to participate. This program truly has it all.



Guided tour around Vilnius



Meeting with President Gitanas Nausėda and the First Lady



Fantastic activities at the Auto Moto Parkas



Meeting with the Minister of Economy and Innovation

Bring Together Lithuania surprised me so much and surpassed all my expectations. I obtained the well-rounded academic, cultural, and professional experience that I was searching for this summer. Academically, I learned so much about the Lithuanian political and business environments. Having grown up in the US, I was very familiar with domestic current events and political debates, however, this was not always the case for events in Lithuania. This program helped immensely with this issue. We had the honor to discuss economic and political issues with Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda and a variety of relevant subjects with the Minister of Economy and Innovation Aušrinė Armonaitė. In addition, we had the privilege to discuss domestic topics with Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė's team, as well as the role of Lithuania in the region with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was amazing to see how engaged these high-level individuals and institutions were with the Lithuanian diaspora. These meetings helped me get a better sense of the dynamic political environment in Lithuania and the region. I was equally pleased with the business visits and presentations from business leaders throughout the program. We had the opportunity to visit different organizations such as Invest Lithuania, Abbvie, Elinta, Lithuanian Railways, and the Vilnius Tech Park. These visits were eye-opening because they showed me how much Lithu-

ania has modernized over the years and how open the country is to new ideas.

Culturally, Bring Together Lithuania helped me learn about Lithuania's past and its trajectory towards the future. A visit to Trakai castle and the subsequent boat ride around the islands was a great way to appreciate medieval Lithuanian architecture. The visit to the Palace of The Grand Dukes of Lithuania in Vilnius taught me about the rich history of Vilnius that I had no idea existed. I learned that Gediminas castle is not the actual historical castle, but only a piece of an enormous fortress and city that once existed hundreds of years ago. Trips to old town Kaunas and Klaipeda were equally as impressive. These visits organized by Bring Together Lithuania strengthened my appreciation for Lithuania's rich culture and history.

Professionally, Bring Together Lithuania introduced me to Enterprise Lithuania. Enterprise Lithuania is a non-profit organization owned by the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Lithuania. Its mission is the support for small and medium-sized enterprises and encouragement of Lithuanian producers' export. I had always been on the fence between working in the public or private sector. This internship opportunity gave me experience in both sectors because although I was working for a government organization, I learned a lot about different private companies throughout Lithuania and their business strategies. I had the pleasure to work specifically with Lithuanian defense sector companies that produce UAVs, lasers, communication systems, and many more. In addition, I was tasked with creating a preliminary Lithuanian export map that depicts Lithuania's trading partners around the world and the number of exports from different sectors. This experience has been very useful because it has allowed me to build upon my studies in international business and has given me a closer look at the thriving high-tech Lithuanian business environment from the point of view of a government agency. Most importantly, it has strengthened my resume and has provided me with critical tools that I will take with me as I get ready to start my career.

I can write many more paragraphs and pages about my experience with Bring Together Lithuania. However, words by themselves cannot explain how much I've



enjoyed participating in the program. I have made friendships that will last a lifetime and I have greatly broadened my professional network. I have learned more about Lithuanian culture and history than I ever could have imagined. I had intellectual conversations with leaders that truly cared about my perspective. I gained work experience that will put me in a more competitive position in the future. And most importantly, I was able to cultivate my love for Lithuania and all its values that helped my

family get through the hardest of times all those years ago. I truly recommend this program to anyone that desires to strengthen their Lithuanian roots and to experience a summer full of endless adventure. I could not be more thankful to Kamilė Naraitė and the Bring Together Lithuania team for giving me this amazing opportunity. I encourage everyone to rediscover what Lithuania has to offer through this program because it can very well change your life!

## Kipras Belopetravičius

I was born in Kaunas, Lithuania in 1999. When I was just an infant, my mother won a green card and we moved to Chicago, Illinois where I have lived my entire life to this day. I grew up as a huge Lithuanian patriot in Chicago as I have been a member of the Ateitininkai organization and Lithuanian choirs since my youngest years. Along with this, we uphold our Lithuanian identity at home by speaking almost exclusively Lithuanian, cooking and eating Lithuanian food, and celebrating holidays in a traditional way. I feel this preservation of my Lithuanian identity is one of the most important aspects of my life. I visit Lithuania almost every Summer as the rest of my family still lives there. We would always visit our Sodas, take trips to museums, and head down to the beach by Palanga. I have also attended every Dainų Šventė since I started singing in my choir which greatly strengthened my pride for the nation.

I chose to spend my Summer in Lithuania because I will always take any opportunity to spend some time in my homeland. More importantly, this is the first time I will be working as an active member of Lithuanian society instead of just visiting family during my summer vacations. I enjoyed visiting my tėvynė, however, I never really imagined myself working or living there. While I was awestruck by reading the grand history of the country from the golden age of Vytautas to the heroic stories of partisans in the forests, I never viewed Lithuania through rose-colored glasses. I remember from my early childhood seeing the shadows of the Soviet Union's occupation still cast a long shadow over Lithuania. It was full of frowning faces, monolithic and monochromatic khrushchyovkas, as well as a sense of depression hanging in the air. However, I was always proud to be a Lithuanian and loved my country for what it was. As I got older, I began noticing so



Singing Lithuanian national anthem

many changes with every visit. At a certain point, the Lithuania I once knew was almost unrecognizable. Buildings were being restored full of color, infrastructure projects were everywhere, and the newer generations seemed full of smiles and hope. The Bring Together Lithuania program has introduced me to the fullest extent of just how far our little nation has come since those old days. Seeing all the outstanding progress and how it keeps accelerating fills me with an insatiable urge to hop on the train and do my part to send Lithuania into a bright and prosperous future.

Currently, I am in my third year of studying Electrical Engineering at the Illinois Institute of Technology. Valdas Adamkus himself graduated from this school during his time in the United States which greatly motivates me as I am able to follow in his footsteps. BTL managed to find the perfect internship for me at Vilnius brand new cogeneration power plant run by Ignitis Group. I chose to work for Ignitis Group as they are responsible for power generation and distribution in the country and as an Electrical Engineer I have a particular interest in Power Engineering. The plant I currently work at, while fully

operational, still has areas under construction and is considered to be the most modern cogeneration power plant in all of Europe at the moment. I am honored to be a part of such an advanced technological facility and to be able to provide such an essential service to hundreds of thousands of Lithuanians. The knowledge I gained from my project of updating the plant's general schematics has been invaluable as it required me to familiarize myself with all the pipes, valves, as well as every aspect of the power plant and how it all interacts with each other. At first, I was overwhelmed getting lost in an endless maze of pipelines, concrete, and cables. However, over time, I got acquainted with the facility and found great pleasure in wandering the halls working at my own pace, taking notes on my schematics. While this



Meeting the President and the First Lady

is only my first internship, I believe that it will be the most influential for my prospects.



The opening ceremony of Bring Together Lithuania 2021 at the Kazickas family residence in Vilnius

Bring Together Lithuania provides an unmatched ability to network with some of the most prominent figures in Lithuanian business, politics, and cultural society stemming from Presidents and ministers to startups and youth groups. So far it has been one of the most exciting and professional experiences of my life. Through the various excursions and tours, we are able to explore the country and take in the abundant culture and history of our little nation. Some of my favorite activities were visiting the port city of Klaipeda, where we went to the beach and a concert, as well as the hot air balloon flight, which provided us with a serene and beautiful view of Vilnius and the surrounding countryside. Along with this, some amazing people we had the honor of meeting were President Gitanas Nausėda with the First Lady Diana Nausėdienė

as well as Vladas Lašas, the co-owner of Elinta. All of whom enhanced our understanding of Lithuanian politics and business through engaging in active discussion. The group that came together was incredibly diverse with participants ranging from the United States, Ireland, Russia, and even Brazil. Over the course of the program, the bonds made between group members become similar to a family and will more than likely expand far past our six weeks together, further expanding our Lithuanian networks worldwide. I absolutely recommend this program to anyone who is trying to grow their Lithuanian roots and is looking to expand their professional network as well as meet and form new friendships with the Lithuanian diaspora from all around the globe.

## Dovilė Navickaitė

Sveiki! I'm Dovilė, a recent graduate of Rutgers University with a degree in Strategic Public Communication and Public Relations and a minor in Theatre, and this summer I'm participating in the Bring Together Lithuania program. I wasn't planning on spending this summer in Lithuania but as they say, if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans! However, I truly could not be happier that life brought me here this summer, with this amazing group of people.

I was born in Lithuania, but my family and I moved to the United States when I was a child. We flew back to Lithuania often when I was younger and I always loved going back; getting to see family and friends, exploring Vilnius, and of course eating the most delicious food. However, over the years we visited less and less due to various academic, professional, and financial reasons. Summertime was suddenly occupied with studies and work, childhood friends had grown up, and I was building my life in America. With time and over such distance, I began to feel a gap between me and my homeland develop. So when I heard about Bring Together LT through social media, I decided to apply as it was the perfect opportunity to experience life in Lithuania as a working, professional adult.



Eva, Dovilė, and Daria celebrate Lithuanian Statehood Day

This summer I'm working in the Marketing and Public Relations department of Tyto Alba, the third-largest publishing house in Lithuania. I was truly blown away

by how kind and welcoming everyone at Tyto Alba was and I could not be happier to be spending my summer working here. What's amazing about this program is that it not only organizes a unique, individual internship for each participant but also organizes meetings with different leaders and innovators from various fields, as well as political figures (did I mention we had a sit-down meeting with President Gitanas Nausėda and First Lady Diana Nausėdienė?) and so much more.

This summer has truly exceeded all of my expectations; I got to experience Lithuania from so many new cultural, professional, and social perspectives, which I hadn't experienced before. I saw Lithuania from above (via our hot air balloon trip), below (by visiting the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania), around (through our trips around the country), and within (by meeting with so many Lithuanian companies). I met so many incredible people and made friends for life. Some of my favorite experiences were traveling to cities like Kaunas and Klaipėda, meeting political figures like the Mayor of Vilnius, Remigijus Šimašius, the Minister of Economy and Innovation, Aušrinė Armonaitė, and of course President Gitanas Nausėda, and weekend adventures like going to



Hot air balloon flight over Vilnius

Trakų Pilis and flying in a hot air balloon over Vilnius. I could not recommend the program more to anyone who may be interested in experiencing life in Lithuania for themselves. It was a one-of-a-kind experience that I will always remember.



Meeting President Gitanas Nausėda and the First Lady

## The Lithuanian American Community News

On July 6, Lithuania's State Day, Lithuanian Americans and their friends joined Lithuanians around the world in singing the national anthem of Lithuania. In Chicago, community members sang the anthem while standing on the banks and bridges of the Chicago River as well as onboard boats and jet skis. Adorned with a 30-meter long tricolor, the Chicago Fireboat led a column of smaller ships. The column of ships stopped by the Consulate General of the Republic of Lithuania, where Chicago Lithuanians sang the national anthem together.

Lithuanians around the Washington, DC area sang the anthem at the Capitol Building, one of the most important symbols of freedom and democracy in the United States.

In Los Angeles, Lithuanians sang the national anthem in Santa Monica Beach, one of the most beautiful places in California. This year, they gathered there to see the impressive Great Tricolor of Unity, a banner that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented to the Consulate General and the Lithuanian community in Los Angeles in appreciation of their work in fostering Lithuanian way of life on the West Coast.

Singing the national anthem has already become a unique tradition that unites Lithuanians in various parts of the world.



Singing the national anthem in Los Angeles  
Photo credit: Consulate General of Lithuania in Los Angeles

On the occasion of the Lithuanian State Day on July 6, the National Executive Committee invited members of the Community to the first general meeting with the newly appointed Lithuanian Ambassador to the United States, Audra Plepytė. The meeting was also attended by consuls, honorary consuls, and embassy staff. In her speech, Ambassador Audra Plepytė highlighted the main tasks and goals of the embassy. Later, the issues of concern to Lithuanian Americans, such as the possibilities of preserving dual citizenship and requirements for travel to Lithuania during the pandemic, were discussed. The LAC President Arvydas Urbonavičius and members of the Community acquainted the Ambassador with the LAC activities and plans. The Ambassador expressed her hope to continue the open dialogue and cooperation. During her term in office, she plans to visit as many Lithuanian American communities as possible. The ambassador said she had already marked September 10-12 on her calendar, when the 70th-anniversary celebration will take place in Chicago.

On May 27, a remote meeting of the newly appointed diplomat and the members of the National Executive Committee took place. During the meeting, further cooperation was discussed.



Singing the national anthem in Chicago, Illinois  
Photo credit: Sandra Ščedrina



Lithuanians in Washington, DC sing the national anthem.  
Photo credit: Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania



Meeting the ambassador

# our community

Representatives of the Lithuanian American Community participated in the State Day reception organized by the Lithuanian Embassy in Washington, DC. The reception was attended by over 150 distinguished guests, including members of the US Congress and their advisers, representatives of US institutions, journalists, members of the Washington diplomatic community, and business representatives.

During the opening of the reception, Lithuanian Ambassador to the United States Audra Plepytė noted: "It is very symbolic that we started this week by celebrating the 245th Independence Day of the United States. Today we are celebrating the State Day of Lithuania and the growing friendship between Lithuania and the United States and their future common goals."



Ambassador Audra Plepytė (center) with Lithuanian Americans. Photo credit: Lithuanian Embassy

For 70 years, the Lithuanian American community has been striving to present the interests of Lithuanian Americans to the US government and the media, and will continue this work. The US administration has recently taken steps to lift sanctions on companies building the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline in Russia. This lifting of sanctions poses a threat to Lithuania's security and is a matter of great concern to our community. On May 21, President of the LAC National Executive Committee and Chairwoman of the Public Affairs Council Krista Bard sent a letter to US President Joe Biden (see attached letter) requesting the reinstatement of sanctions against companies building the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline in Russia.

We call on you to share your views with the US government on the forced landing of a European passenger plane in Minsk and the arrest of a journalist, an opposition activist. It is important for Lithuanians in the United States to share their views with their elected officials - we

encourage you to do so in the following ways:

- Send e-mail letter to the White House: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/>
- Contact your state senator: <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm>
- Contact your member of Congress, here you will find the name and contact details of your representative: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>

Now is the right time to acquaint your elected officials with the issues of concern to Lithuanian Americans! Our voice can be heard and make a difference, so let's seize this opportunity. Thank you and hope for your cooperation.

LAC Public Affairs Council

The LAC 70th anniversary banner continues its journey around Lithuanian communities, uniting Lithuanians all over America! The flag visited the Lithuanian Embassy in Washington, DC. The new Lithuanian Ambassador to the United States Audra Plepytė signed the Embassy's name of the flag. The banner has already been signed by leaders of many Lithuanian communities, parishes, and groups.



The anniversary flag in Atlanta



The LAC 70th anniversary flag stops in Philadelphia to commemorate the Day of Mourning and Hope at St. Andrew Church with the Philadelphia Freedom Choir.



The anniversary flag in Atlanta



The flag of unity was welcomed by Lithuanians of St. Petersburg

On September 10-12, the first session of the LAC 23rd Council will take place in the World Lithuanian Center in Lemont, Illinois. That weekend, the WLC will also host events dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the Lithuanian American Community: the unveiling of a fresco, an idea fair, a youth sports festival, an open-air feast, and a festive banquet. Please mark this date on your calendars.

As the Lithuanian American Community celebrates its 70th anniversary, many projects dedicated to this anniversary are being presented. One of them is 70 stories about seventy people that had connections to the Community during different periods of the organization's life (the project is led by Sigita Barysienė). Stories from the cycle "Lithuanian Gene" are published on the LAC website, please visit: <https://javlb.org/istorijos/> If you have stories about people in your community who cherish Lithuanianess, please write to Sigita Barysienė. email [sekretore@javlb.org](mailto:sekretore@javlb.org)



The challenges of today are different from what they used to be. The ability to pull people together is important. LAC leaders would like to attract as many people as possible who would participate in community activities and events and find innovative solutions. How to achieve this? Why do we need it? Is it important? These issues were discussed in a remote leadership workshop "What is the source of inspiration of our leadership?" The workshop was organized by the LAC and led by experienced professionals, Rytis Juozapavičius and Orinta Žvirzdine.



In 2021, the Lithuanian Foundation (LF) awarded \$1,411,359 for student scholarships and various projects. The largest support, \$501,450 (55.4 percent), was provided

# our community

to the Lithuanian American Community. We are grateful for this great support, which enables us to carry out a wide range of social, educational, cultural, sports, heritage preservation, social, and youth projects as well as student internship activities and involve thousands of Lithuanians in all US states.



Members of the LF Grants Commission

Six American students of Lithuanian descent participated in the traditional Lithuanian Diaspora Student Internship (LISS) organized by the Lithuanian American Community. The LISS program has been running for more than 10 years. For 5 weeks, its participants did internships in Lithuanian companies and state institutions according to their fields of study and future career needs. In addition, they participated in cultural events, meetings with various Lithuanian political and business leaders, visited leading companies in their field, improved their Lithuanian language skills, and got acquainted with the daily and cultural life of Lithuania and the changes taking place there. The LISS is sponsored by the Lithuanian Foundation.

On the first day of the internship, LISS participants officially became students of Vilnius University, the oldest university in Lithuania, for 5 weeks and received detailed instructions and tasks for the internship period. At the opening event of LISS 2021, guests were welcomed by the Vice-Rector of the University Dr. Artūras Vasiliauskas. He was glad to see students choose serious internship positions and invited Lithuanian Americans to share smiles and optimism with everyone in Lithuania. The participants of the internship met with the First Lady of Lithuania, Diana Nausėdienė who was glad to see that the young people could speak in Lithuanian and were nurturing Lithuanianness. She was also interested in their impressions of Lithuania and their future plans.

"You are a part of Lithuania, no matter where in the world you live. I sincerely thank your parents and grandparents who instilled in you love for Lithuania and taught you their mother tongue," Diana Nausėdienė said.



Program participants met with the First Lady Diana Nausėdienė



Students visited Trakai

## Culture

On June 5, the Young Talents Competition organized by the LAC Cultural Council took place at the World Lithuanian Center (WLC). The competition was divided into three stages: the first two were virtual, and the third one took place to live in the Siela Gallery. Twenty-eight participants registered for the first stage and sent recordings of their performances. Six best contestants were



selected for the finals. The children's performances were evaluated by a competent commission. The competition was attended not only by young performers from Chicago and its surroundings, but also by representatives from New York, Atlanta, Alabama, and California. Erikas Šileika (teacher Wewen Ma), who played Edward Grieg's "The Dwarf March" on the piano won first place. Gabija Žukauskas (teacher Rima Velickienė), who performed the popular song "Birds" by a trio of actors, won second place. Third place went to pianist Greta Grigas (teacher Silvija Velickaitė), who performed an etude composer Moritz Moszkowski. The winners of the third stage were awarded cash prizes of \$1,000, \$500, and \$300. Prizes were awarded by the Lithuanian Foundation. Participants of the event enjoyed refreshments prepared by Chicago Lithuanians.



Competition finalists, organizers, and commission members  
Photo by Lina Žiogaite

On June 26, the St. John's Day Celebration (Rasos) was organized by the LAC Cultural Council together with the Consulate General of the Republic of Lithuania in Chicago and the World Lithuanian Center in the Forge, an outdoor amusement park in Lemont, Illinois. Although it was raining, Lithuanians still came together on Saturday night to celebrate. Consul General of the Republic of Lithuania Mantvydas Bekešius congratulated the organizers and participants of the event, wishing Lithuanians to be united and continue to cherish Lithuanian traditions. The LAC President Arvydas Urbonavičius thanked Consul General for successful and meaningful cooperation throughout his term and presented him with a commemorative gift from the Lithuanian American Community. Participants of the celebration enjoyed a variety of music and songs by performers from Lithuania, Indiana, and New York. They could also buy various Lithuanian items and souvenirs and enjoy Lithuanian food and drinks. Traditional Lithuanian cake Šakotis was baked on the spot and everyone whose name was Jonas got to enjoy a piece! For both, the organizers and the participants, St.

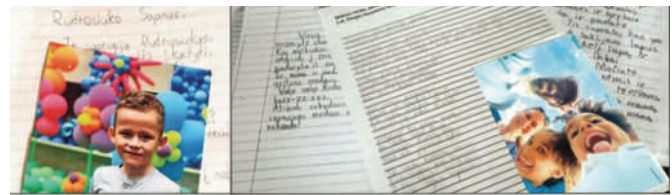
John's Day was a memorable one. It was the first one after the pandemic and was organized for the first time in a new beautiful amusement park that was booked exclusively for Lithuanians. We thank the performers and participants who were not scared by the rain and came together to celebrate St. John's Day. Here we share some moments of the celebration.



Celebration moments

## Education

The corridors of Lithuanian schools are now empty. Students have been awarded their diplomas, awards, and letters of commendation. One more school year came to an end. The annual essay competition this year was called "Many Hands Carry a Heavy Burden." As every year, the competition was organized by the LAC Board of Education. This year, all events and competitions are dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the Lithuanian Community, and the themes of the competition were tied in with the Lithuanian community and the people who created the organization and worked in it. Most schools worked remotely, and students were offered to write their essays together with their families. We received a number of interesting essays, in which students shared their thoughts about fostering Lithuanianess, the Lithuanian identity, and their love for Lithuania. Congratulations to the winners of the competition!



### Rašinių konkurso dalyviai stebino ir džiugino

**LORETA LAGUNAVIČIENĖ**  
Iraiki ir saulėtą balandžio šėtadėniu popietę Malonio Ižančinėje mokykloje (MLM) susirinko ne mažas būrys mokytojų - vienas atokubėjo iš namų po šonų paruošę, kitos atėjo iš savo klasių, ką ik išlydėjusio namo mokinius.

**5-8 klasėms - "Apginta laivė"** - prisimenanti Saulius 13-ojo 30-iesio metimas, Vyrinaišio 9-10 klasių mokinėms - "Daug rankų didiąją našta padėliu". Tai tema, skirta JAV LB 70-iesio metų pamytei.

Bevik vienu šiu metų rašinių konkursui paskirtos temos buvo vartojamos kaip šūktis, o su šiuo JAV Lietuvos Bendruomenės, kurios turiai mas

Čia fantazija tikrai nekovo ribotą Bruvo visho: ir albiūsu, ir perki ir neigi Hogvardo iš "Harry Potter". Bet vertintame komisija kreipė dėmesį į lietuviškumą, autentiškumą personaliais, vertinę išmintiškumą ir patriotiškumą mokytojų rašinysiose. Buvo sukurta daug pasakų bei legendų, idėjų ir labai originalių pasakojimų. Vienas siūlomų "pavykiū" mus į mokytojų "Pakelimo emocijos" "Kas... - tai nevertiname sukuriet, kas ten atsitiko, turėtumėte perskaityti Kovo Rad.

Description of the competition in the Draugas newspaper

## our community

Lithuanian language courses for adults are organized by the LAC Board of Education.

<https://svietimotyba.org/LongDistance/register-2/>  
Are you interested in learning the Lithuanian language? The Lithuanian Educational Council of the USA is offering a long-distance learning program that starts in August 2021. You can learn Lithuanian without leaving the comfort of your home!

We invite you to participate in "Tricolor for Lithuania", a project dedicated to the LAC 70th anniversary. Please submit your works by September 1.

### Youth

Nineteen young Lithuanian-Americans gathered in Lemont on June 18-20 for a young Lithuanian youth leaders conference.

The goals of the conference were to discuss the current status of activity and community involvement among Lithuanian youth in the US; to inform participants of projects, internships, programs, and other opportunities for Lithuanian youth to take advantage of; to discuss the most effective way to share information among the Lithuanian youth community; to bring together the US Delegates of the XVI Lithuanian World Youth Congress and together participate in the virtual Congress program; to share and exchange ideas for the 2021 Lithuanian American Youth Association Annual General Meeting.

Over this weekend, there were various discussions, workshops, presentations, and even a lecture about the Lithuanian Charter and the history of the Lithuanian American Community.

The LAYA and participants of the conference are extremely grateful for the generous financial support of the Lithuanian Foundation - the primary sponsor of the event, and to the Ateitis Foundation for allowing us to host the conference at the Ateitis Foundation home. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Lithuanian American Community Executive board, the NY, Boston, and LA Lithuanian Communities, and other notable individual members of our community for their financial, emotional, and organizational support that helped make this event possible.



Participants of the conference

Due to the pandemic, the North American Lithuanian folk dance festival in Philadelphia had already been postponed twice and the date of the song festival in Cleveland had to be rescheduled as well. We hope that these two celebrations will finally take place in 2022 and 2023. Wishing to at least virtually enjoy moments of dancing and singing, the Lithuanian American Youth Association and the Lithuanian American Community are hosting live open-air gatherings in Chicago this summer and showing recordings from past festivals. All Lithuanian communities are invited to join. On June 4, during the first come-together, the song festival of 2015 and the dance festival of 2016 were viewed on the World Lithuanian Center lawn in Lemont, Illinois. Marija Čyvaitė, Chairwoman of the Lithuanian American Youth Association congratulated the participants. We would like to believe that this evening was the first step towards new events and future celebrations that we all miss so much. Other viewings of song and dance festival recordings will take place on July 30 and August 6. We invite other Lithuanian American communities to join this initiative and hold outdoor parties in their areas at the same time. Several communities have already joined! For other communities interested in displaying past holiday records in their locations, please email [mayachiapetta@comcast.net](mailto:mayachiapetta@comcast.net) (Maja Chiapetta, Vice President of LAYA).

The Lithuanian American Community, together with the Lithuanian American Youth Association and thanks to the gracious financial support of the Lithuanian Foundation is proud to present a new project, "Roots". The project will take place August 12-16, 2021 in southern Illinois. Participants will spend their time in Ledford, Illinois looking for, maintaining, and identifying Lithuanian cemeteries and graves, while discussing the importance of preserving Lithuanian-American history and heritage. This project will help Lithuanian-American youth rediscover the roots and history of our community and experience it in a brand new way.



## Sports

Taking into account that this year's Olympic Day events took place in real-time in the Lithuanian capital, the World Lithuanian Community Sports Affairs Commission decided to continue the annual tradition and together with LTOK organized a run in various countries. Symbolically marking the 33rd anniversary of the independent Lithuanian National Olympic Committee, on June 21-27, a group of Lithuanian Americans ran the symbolic mile together with Lithuanians around the world. It is expected that the Olympic mile run tradition will continue every year.



We invite you to contribute to the activities of our organization and support it in celebrating its 70th anniversary.

Dear members and friends of our Community,

This year, the Lithuanian Community of the United States is celebrating its 70th anniversary. This significant year, our community is celebrating with a number of events in various states. The celebration will culminate with a banquet, held on September 11, 2021, at the World Lithuanian Center, Lemont, Illinois. Your support is extremely important to us; without it, we will not be able to successfully celebrate our 70th anniversary and achieve the goals of fostering Lithuanianess.

We invite you not only to celebrate together but also to support our organization, thanks to which various and wide-ranging activities are developed: Lithuanian education, fostering our unique culture, social activities, heritage preservation works, and strengthening relations with Lithuania.

You will find more information at <https://javlb.org/70th/>.

You can download our brochure here: <https://javlb.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Sponsorship-Letter-JAV-LB-70th-Anniversary.pdf> [you can only "type/hyperlink the word" here "without putting all links as copy> paste"] Thank you very much!



**VYDUNAS YOUTH FUND, INC. (VYDŪNO JAUNIMO FONDAS)**  
proudly presents its **FIRST** **CONTEST**

# CREATE-A-GREETING-CARD

**Themes:**  
Christmas, Easter, Wedding, Birthday, Thank You, All Occasion.

All entries – original photographs, paintings, drawings, graphic design – must be received **by September 15, 2021.**

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# current events

## Defense

...The annual large-scale U.S. Army Europe and Africa-led, multinational, joint exercise, DEFENDER-Europe 21, includes 30,000 troops from 27 nations with operations in 30 training areas in a dozen countries. C-130J Super Hercules aircraft from Ramstein Air Base, Germany, delivered Rhode Island Air National Guard to Siauliai Airbase in Lithuania. NATO's Global Response Force is conducting airborne Joint Forcible Entries in Bulgaria, Estonia, and Romania with Estonia and Bulgaria jumps being conducted during darkness.

...The famous U.S. 82nd Airborne Division flew non-stop 4600 miles from its base in Fort Bragg, NC to northern Estonia to drop 750 paratroopers of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team alongside B Company, 2nd Battalion of the British Army's Parachute Regiment. One Brigade of the 82nd Airborne is always deployable on 18 hours-notice.

...Belarus used a false bomb report and scrambled a fighter jet to intercept an Irish Ryanair plane traveling from Athens to Vilnius with dissident Belarusian journalist, Raman Pratasevich, to divert the plane to land in Minsk. The United Nations' International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) representing 192 member states will investigate the incident and can suspend Belarus' voting rights. The group, Reporters without Borders (RSB) has asked Vilnius prosecutors to investigate Belarusian President Alexandre Lukashenko for criminal hijacking.

...In their 2020 performance report, the Lithuanian State Security Department (VSD) noted 200 Lithuanian citizens were targeted by intelligence services of Russia, Belarus, China, and others in 20 attempts to recruit for undeclared intelligence activities (spying). In collaboration with the Czech Republic, two staff members of the Russian Embassy in Vilnius were expelled for "their activity incompatible with the diplomatic status". Five foreigners were expelled or denied entry because of their association with Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, and other terrorist organizations.

...The heads of state of Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia gathered in Warsaw to celebrate the 230th anniversary of the adoption of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's Constitution on May 3, 1791, two years after the U.S. Constitution. However, an attempt to implement the provisions of the document failed due to resistance of the local leaders and the Russian occupation of Poland in 1792. The gathering was an opportunity

for the signing of a joint declaration of solidarity against threats to their common security.

## COVID-19

...With Vilnius experiencing a 14-day case rate of 992 cases per 100,000 vs. a Lithuanian average of 539 and a positive test rate of 7.3 percent vs. 6.3 nationwide, the Lithuanian Health Ministry reallocated 19,800 vaccine doses that were scheduled to go to 50 other municipalities. The respective mayors were incensed at the diversion and even the mayor of Vilnius found the "theft" "unacceptable". Some of the diversions were from tourist locations that were preparing for summer visitors by inoculating service providers, e.g. Palanga on the Baltic coast received only 540 doses instead of the planned 790.

...The Lithuanian government has approved the "Opportunity Passport" known as the "Freedom ID" for individuals who have been vaccinated against COVID-19 or have recovered from the coronavirus or have a negative test result within 24 hours or are under the age of 16. The identification will be in the form of a Quick Response (QR) code available via Lithuania's e-health system, e.sveikata. Passport holders will be served indoors at restaurants, cafes, bars, gambling venues, and betting shops. However, nightclubs will remain closed.

...The Lithuanian Health Minister plans on purchasing 5.58 million vaccine doses from BioNTech/Pfizer in 2022-2023 which would cover current needs and the possible need for revaccination. Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte suggests waiting before purchasing vaccines before there is scientific proof that they are necessary. A total of 10.7 million doses from 8 producers have already been ordered.

...Since the start of the pandemic, 272,231 people have tested positive and 250,661 are considered recovered and alive with 11,943 still sick. COVID-19 is listed as the direct cause of death of 4,220 while the number of deaths directly or indirectly related to COVID-19 has reached 8,516. The number of deaths indirectly attributed to COVID-19 actually exceeds those directly attributed.

## Business

...The Lithuania Ambassador to China, Diana Mickeviciene informed the South China Morning Post that Lithuania has withdrawn from the Chinese initiative "17+1" because the anticipated improved access to the Chinese market of 1,445 million customers was not forth-

coming since its 2012 membership. The withdrawal was confirmed by Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis noting that the relationship of the (17) Central and Eastern Europe Countries with (1) China had been divisive and that a full 27 member EU approach to China (27+1) may be more effective. Politically the Lithuanian Seimas voted to adopt a resolution condemning China's treatment of the Uyghur Muslims and encouraged UN action. In another political/economic action that drew China's ire, it is reported that Lithuania will open an economic representative office in Taiwan by the end of the year. It happens that Lithuania and Taiwan are already paired in a U.S. Department of Defense procurement of \$176 million worth of Raytheon-Lockheed Martin Javelin anti-tank guided munition with a completion date of Nov. 30, 2023.

...The Lithuanian subsidiary of the Japanese Wiring Technologies company Yazaki, based in the Klaipeda Free Economic Zone announced the closing of the plant and 435 workers will lose their jobs. Last year the company employed over 1,000.

...Vinted, the Lithuanian vendor of second-hand clothing and accessories which came to market in November 2019 at a valuation of over 1 billion euros, attracted another investment of 250 million euros which will fund its expansion into Canada, and improve its security, payment, delivery, and infrastructure. Much of the new investment comes from original investors. It now employs 700 which supports markets in 14 countries with headquarters in Vilnius and offices in Berlin, Utrecht, and Prague. Its 45 million users pay no seller's fees with the buyers paying a buyer protection fee for transactions completed on its site. The company's market valuation is now 3.5 billion euros.

...With the political unrest in Belarus, Lithuania has attracted 43 companies with an additional 37 examining a potential move. Another indicator is that 12,000 Belarusians have received visas to Lithuania. In contrast, Latvia has only attracted 15 companies and 3 are examining a move. One factor in Lithuania's favor is that family members of foreign employees can obtain visas whereas they currently cannot in Latvia. One facet of Belarus' "hybrid war" against Lithuania is the illegal passage of 500 Middle East migrants, mostly Iraqis, through Belarus into Lithuania this year.

...German prosecutors are looking into the actions of Vilnius-based payments company, UAB Finolita Unio, in the transfer/theft of more than 100 million euros from German-based Wirecard which went bankrupt last year

when nearly 2 billion euros were missing. Finolita Unio was paid at a rate of 1,000 euros per hour for 1,000 hours (1 million euros) for their "services". The possible fraud by Finolita Unio, which is licensed by the Bank of Lithuania, tarnishes Lithuania's goal of being a worldwide financial hub replacing London with the UK leaving the EU.

...The Lithuanian Gaming Control Authority has fined UAB New Miracle 10,000 euros because it found evidence that it did not properly identify and verify customers before entering into business relationships. The lack of internal policy and controls could enable money laundering and financing of terrorism. The Authority also warned unlicensed operators that it could block access to their websites if they continue to offer online gambling without a permit. Blocking the Domain Name System (DNS) which converts the URL alphanumeric web address to the IP numerical address essentially blocks the payment process.

...In a related development, the Seimas has voted to ban gambling promotions, special events, discounts, gifts, and other incentives. The ban pertains to both land-based and online gambling markets in Lithuania. During the COVID-19 lockdown, gambling operators agreed to stop all gambling advertising.

EU-Startups reports that Interactio, a remote interpretation platform, has raised 24.4 million euros in Series A funding from investors including Alibaba, Silicon Valley-based Storm Ventures, and Jaan Tallinn, a co-founder of Skype. Founded in 2014 with offices in Vilnius and Klaipeda, Interactio's clients include the European Commission, European Parliament, the UN, Google, BMW, JP Morgan, and Microsoft providing real-time multilingual interpretation services for remote or hybrid meetings. Spurred by the COVID shutdown Interactio grew 12-fold between 2019 and 2020 with over 100 employees and is profitable. It has hosted 120,000 attendees connected simultaneously.

### General

...The Teltonika IoT Group signed a cooperative agreement with Kaunas University of Technology (KTU) to provide 30 scholarships to first-year KTU students (300 euros per month for 10 months) who choose among electrical, electronic, and mechanical engineering, informatics, mathematics, and natural sciences. The 2020 European Commission Digital Economy and Society Index showed that the number of IT graduates in Lithuania is only 2.7% which ranks it near the bottom (23rd out of 27 countries) in the number of technology graduates. The scholarship

## current events

holders will also have access to internships and employment within Teltonika which plans to expand its number of employees in Lithuania to 3,000 by 2025.

...MONAT, a Multi-Level Marketing beauty brand started in Doral, FL in 2014 and expanded to the U.K. in 2018, and Ireland and Poland in 2019 will launch in Lithuania in the summer of 2021. The hair care and styling products, skincare, and wellness company uses direct social selling will use virtual events and regional roadshows to introduce their business model to Lithuania.

...Lithuania has become an Associate Member of the European Space Agency (ESA) for at least the next 7 years. This relationship will enable Lithuanian scientists to participate in joint projects. Lithuania has progressed from the general Cooperation Agreement and a Plan for the European Cooperating States (PECS) where 35 contracts have been placed for projects in education, generic technology, Earth observation, science, telecoms, and human and robotic exploration. As an Associate Member, Lithuania can attend ESA meetings and vote on questions. Lithuania plans on opening a Business Incubation Center to turn space-related business ideas into commercial start-ups. Existing Lithuanian companies have demonstrated competencies in nanosatellites, propulsion systems, lasers, photonics, life sciences, physical sciences, and radio-frequency systems.

...A 2021 survey of 3,000 respondents by Citadel Bank and the research agency Norstat, found that parents are financially supporting their adult children to the tune of 80% in Lithuania, 56% in Latvia, and 55% in Estonia. Expenses that were covered included everyday food, rent, tuition, car, and home down-payments. In turn, 31% of Lithuanians provide financial support to their parents as do 19% of Latvians and 18% of Estonians. Many Baltics also provide non-financial support to their parents.



ESA Director General Josef Aschbacher with the Ambassador of Lithuania to France Nerijus Aleksiejunas

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# bridges

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