

# bridges



LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

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**October 2022**

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## from the editor

Dear reader,

You are holding the October issue of Bridges, and I hope you will enjoy the articles. The stories in this issue mostly testify to our love for Lithuania, the homeland of our ancestors. The ties the Lithuanian American Community has with Lithuania are very strong. The LISS program is one of the successful programs that bring young people of Lithuanian descent to Lithuania in order to strengthen their ties with the country. Bring Together Lithuania is another such program. Reading the accounts of the participants, you will learn how immensely gratifying the program is. I hope you will spread the news about these two programs, and perhaps your children or grandchildren would be willing to participate as well.

Of course, knowing the Lithuanian language would help immensely. Young people learn languages quickly. Nowadays, there are many ways to learn Lithuanian. If you live near any of the 38 Lithuanian Saturday schools in the United States, you can bring your children or grandchildren there (please follow this link to see the list of schools: <https://svietimotaryba.org/lituanistines-mokyklos-irstovyklos/mokyklu-sarasas/>). If you attend the University of Illinois in Chicago (UIC), you can also take Lithuanian 101 through Lithuanian 104. I happen to teach Lithuanian courses at UIC. Another way of learning Lithuanian is to register for a course online. I myself have three groups of adult students, whom I teach in the evenings. There are other courses as well; one of them is offered by the Lithuanian American Community (Follow the link for information: <https://svietimotaryba.org/LongDistance/>).

The Lithuanian language is not an easy language to learn. However, it is very gratifying to know that you tried to keep it alive by learning it. Even though the Lithuanian language is still holding strong and is nowhere near dying, we need to constantly feed that flame and encourage everyone, especially our young, to learn it. I hope you will find a Lithuanian language course suitable for you and enjoy learning the language of your ancestors.

Wishing you a calm and gratifying month of October,

Karilė Vaitkutė  
Editor

# Hearts Lifted by a Week of Close Togetherness

By Barbara Zawkiewicz Conaty

*To make up for missing travel to Lithuania in recent years, several members of my family and I visited Kaunas and Vilnius in June 2022. Here are some highlights of our trip. Three of our special activities during this visit were events organized to honor Dalia Grinkevičiūtė on the 95th anniversary of her birth.*

## June 8, 2022

In Klaipėda, the Švyturys Brewery is more than a beer production facility; it is also a cultural center, a tourist magnet, and a good restaurant with astonishing interior décor. Before our tour and tasting, I visited the exhibit honoring Jonas Mekas, a centenarian avant-garde film



Tasting night at the Švyturys Brewery in Klaipėda



Art show about Fluxus and Jonas Mekas, a famous Lithuanian Fluxus artist in the USA till his death in 2022

artist whose roots and heart were in Lithuania but whose livelihood was in New York City. He was affiliated with the international art movement Fluxus through his close ties with its founder George Maciunas (Jurgis Mačiūnas). This exhibit featured brief films by Mekas on topics ranging from Elvis Presley to Andy Warhol. To learn more about this famous Lithuanian American, visit here: <https://english.lithuanianculture.lt/news/2021/03/01/100-years-in-one-month-mekas-maciunas-fluxus/>

## June 9, 2022

Unlike other trips to Nida, this trip did not include a romp in the famous dunes of this Baltic Sea beach. The border with Kaliningrad, Russia's exclave on the Baltic Sea, runs right across the dunes of the Curonian Spit. It was never possible to cross the border into the exclave without a Russian visa but we did not even get within a bird's eye view of the border. For more about this border take a look at this link: <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2021/05/17/keeping-watch-at-lithuanias-most-remote-border-post/>

## June 10, 2022

The Maironis Museum of Lithuanian Literature near the Town Hall in Old Town Kaunas is featuring an extraordinary exhibition honoring the life and literary works of Dalia Grinkevičiūtė, Lithuania's famous and talented advocate for Lithuanians sent into Siberian exile in June 1941.

Our docent Tadas Jakubauskas led our English language tour, and it reminded me that in the English translation of her memoir, Dalia mentions one awful day when the work chief of Dalia's group canceled their one day of



Maironis Museum in Kaunas invites to the exhibit about Dalia Grinkevičiūtė who wrote about her Siberian exile with great skill

rest. To honor the head of state, all Soviet citizens were expected to work for free that one day. To the chief's dismay, a sudden fierce blizzard blew in and the work plan was abandoned. Dalia recalled how one sharp-tongued, pretty girl, Irena Jankauskytė, remarked that even God did not want the group to work for free that day.

I had a cousin whose name is recorded in official records as Irena Jankauskaitė. Her mother was Jadvyga nee Zavkevičiūtė Jankauskienė, sister of Waclaw Zawkwiewicz and wife of Herkulanas Jankauskas. The whole family was swept up in the June 1941 round-up of 17,000 victims of Soviet political terrorism. Jadvyga and her two children were sent to Trofimovsk Island on the Lena River where it meets the Laptev Sea. Dalia Grinkevičiūtė and her mother may have been political prisoners in the same forced labor camp as my cousin Irena.

### June 11, 2022

At the Day of Mourning and Remembrance at the Rumšiškės Museum event with the Lapteviečiai Brotherhood, my niece Anita Amirrezvani met with Irena Saulutė Špakauskienė, a Trofimovsk survivor who still volunteers for this organization. Anita is writing a book about the



Barbara with President Vytautas Landsbergis at the Day of Remembrance at Rumšiškės, June 11, 2022. Photo by Barbara's sister, Beata Zibung

experiences of our family during the terrible years of the 1940s. Anita also met with Aldona Markevičienė, the widow of the author of the book, *The Path of Exile*, Mindaugas Markevičius. This book included photos of Leonas and Irena Jankauskas, my cousins exiled to the Laptev Sea. Mrs. Markevičienė referred Anita to Vitalis Staugaitis, another survivor now living in Vilnius in a home for elderly survivors of the deportation operation in June 1941. He wrote an account of his exile in Trofimovsk, which includes his drawing of his dwelling. The floor plan showed that he and his family lived in the southeast corner of the hut while the Jankauskas mother and her two children lived in the northwest corner of the room. Anita met with Mr. Staugaitis and her interpreter Vytautas Juršėnas for several hours.

I was fortunate to have a brief, private conversation with President Landsbergis. He had visited the Library of Congress, where I worked while he was on a trip to gather support for Lithuania's fight for independence. He speaks English and inquired about the reason I was present at the Day of Mourning and Remembrance, which he attends every year.

### June 13, 2022

Another niece of mine, Živilė Jasunskienė drove me and my husband to an exhibit of porcelain vessels made by Ramutė Juršienė. For decades, my sister Stefanija Chreptavičienė, who has lived in Kaunas all her life, has given me gifts of works made by Ramutė. The exhibit was on display at Gelgaudiškis Manor in the Šakiai District of Suvalkija, Lithuania's best region for farming grains. The Gelgaudiškis gardens are Lithuania's largest at nearly 300 acres. The manor house is stately and was rehabilitated in recent years, a process not yet completed. Of note are the tall interior window shutters, which are an original feature of the manor's woodwork. Each pair of shutters on the ground floor still works perfectly.

Though it was home to two historic families for several centuries, the manor became a children's home in the later 1900s. Before their retirements from their jobs, our two hosts for this visit had been teachers at the home for decades. Today the manor house is not used as a home, but the institution for children continues on the grounds in new buildings. Our hosts for the day were Irma and Vitalis Gailiūnas, who are related by marriage to one of my cousins in Kėdainiai.

After the tour of the manor, including its rooftop viewing platform with a vista all the way to the Nemunas River to the north, Irma and Vitalis took us on a short drive to their cottage in the town. It is a traditional cottage and still uses its original ceramic stove for heating and cooking. The woodpile for this important task is housed in a second small cottage behind the main house. Vitalis has



wooden sculptures of ancient Lithuanian deities in his garden, a place of traditional and spiritual beauty. Irma and Vitalis continue to volunteer as docents at the Gelgaudiškis Manor and so were able to give us the tour on a Monday, a day all such institutions are closed to the public.



Porcelain artists at Gelgaudiškis tour



A welcome to this traditional homestead of the Gailiūnas couple

### June 14, 2022

This day included two major expeditions. The first was devoted to a visit to Stukai, the home village of the Jankauskas family until 1941. This was the family of my father's older sister. At present, the local agricultural college operates a farm there that tests seeds and conducts other studies that are important for the farm sector. When the Jankauskas family lived here, there were homes of owners like Herkulanus Jankauskas and cottages for farm laborers. No cottages or farm structures at this location survived collectivization when the Soviet government compelled all farmers to convert to the Communist model. Individuals were not allowed to own land. All farm work was done according to centralized five-year plans.

Our guides this morning were Vytautas Juršėnas, Anita's researcher/interpreter, his wife, Parisa Sabbaghi (an Iranian woman), his mother Vanda Juršėnienė, and her maternal aunt Aldona Atkočiūnienė nee Grinkutė. We met at a Kėdainiai coffee shop in the Old Town. After introductions and a review of the day's task, we drove to the two locations recalled by Mrs. Atkočiūnienė and Vanda.

As a young girl, Mrs. Atkočiūnienė, now 88 years old, lived in Stukai village and knew of the Jankauskas family. After Vanda was born, she also became familiar with this village and vividly remembers the crossroads where one side road led to the village, and the other side road led to the Jankauskas farm near a large grove of ancient trees. Today there is a directional sign "Liepos" harking back to the time it was called Linden Lane and led to the *dvaras* (manor house) of the Jankauskas family. The deportations of Lithuanians touched many families, including Vanda's. Her paternal grandfather was in the 1941 transport to Siberia. He was able to return to Lithuania in 1959 but died two years later because the privations of his deten-

tion broke his health forever.

Family history note: On our way to Kėdainiai, we passed Labūnava, a village from our family's history. In Peter Kongiel's story (he was my maternal grandfather), this village was an estate that belonged to the wealthy Zabiello family. Count Zabiello also owned the estate at Apytalaukis, the location where Peter and Teresa Kongiel lived with their daughters before they moved to their own farm, Marianka. Peter was the estate manager of both the Labūnava property and the Apytalaukis property.

Coincidentally, our uncle by marriage, Antanas Butkevičius, also worked at Apytalaukis. Not yet married at age 45, he met Kongiel's daughter Jadvyga, age 20. She had already given up hopes of a love match when her sweetheart broke off their relationship. She accepted Antanas's proposal. They married and had one son, Roman. Antanas and his family moved to Dotnuva where he worked as a driver, and Jadvyga operated a small shop from their home.

The tower at the Labūnava estate became notorious in 1946 when it was a hideout for five Lithuanian partisans. They were killed here by Soviet soldiers on Christmas Day.

Nearby is the village of Vandžiogala, whose history includes an important battle in 1384 when Vytautas the Great, with help from the Teutonic Knights, defeated his cousin Skirgaila's claim to power. More recently, this hamlet was another place where German and later Soviet soldiers executed partisans, many of them Jewish.

Once we had dropped off Vanda and her aunt near their homes, the two-car party headed to Šilalė where the premiere of a documentary about the medical career of Dalia Grinkevičiūtė was scheduled in the town's Statkevičius Museum.

Director Justinas Lingys had to wait till the easing of

pandemic conditions to show this film as it was “in the can” and ready to go just before Covid-19 kept people away from public events.

By focusing on Dalia’s work as a physician, the film evokes her intelligence, humanity, and other qualities besides her endurance as an exile. One of the most moving passages of the film was when Dr. Adolfina Striaukienė recalled how Dr. Dalia Grinkevičiūtė mentored the younger woman and gave her support and inspiration at the Laukuva hospital where both were employed. Dr. Striaukienė was present at the film’s premiere and broke into tears when she spoke of her dear supervisor.

Another passage of the film showed images of Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov and his wife Yelena Bonner. Dr. Grinkevičiūtė managed to get an appointment to see the couple during their house arrest. He asked Dalia what she wanted him to do. She replied that she wanted her book to be published. Under the Soviet system of censorship, it was illegal for Lithuanian exiles to write anything about their experiences in the forced labor camps. Sakharov arranged for the manuscript to be smuggled to Paris, where it was published in the Russian dissident journal *Pamyat* (Memory) in 1974.

Between these two excursions, we visited the home of Lithuania’s most famous *koldūnai*. In the village of Viduklė, right off the main highway, there is a modest establishment serving up bowls of these tasty Lithuanian dumplings. See the comments in Trip Advisor:

[https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant\\_Review-g7377501-d14150828-Reviews-Vidukles\\_koldunai-Vidukle\\_Kaunas\\_County.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Review-g7377501-d14150828-Reviews-Vidukles_koldunai-Vidukle_Kaunas_County.html)



The famous pink soup of Lithuania, *šaltibarščiai*, cold borscht



Viduklė *koldūnai* famous in all of Lithuania as the best the country has to offer in this culinary staple

### June 15, 2022

This was a day devoted to visiting Vilnius. Živilė and Anita drove my group straight to the Wróblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. I have a librarian friend there, Birutė Railienė. They worked together



Current bestsellers in a Vilnius bookstore

at the Library of Congress many years ago. Birutė was away on vacation, but Agnė Zemkajutė, Ana Vencloviėnė, and Erika Kuliešienė took charge of us. Agnė and Ana had selected a variety of manuscripts and incunables (books printed in movable type before Dec. 31, 1500). Agnė gave us a very learned introduction to the treasures of the library, which originally belonged to the Vilnius lawyer, public figure, and bibliophile Tadeusz Stanisław



Joe, Ed, and Barbara visiting the Wróblewski Library in Vilnius on June 15, 2022



Wróblewski (Tadas Stanislovas Vrublevskis). One of the most astonishing items is a large parchment volume shot through with a single bullet by a Red Army soldier, perhaps as his unit passed through Vilnius on its way to the German front.

Over time, the collection grew, and eventually, a stately palace was built right across from Cathedral Square to house the thousands of items. The library collects many subjects including books and archives of the Lithuanian diaspora. Barbara was told that the library's acquisition policy includes collecting materials like family documents, photographs, and letters.

After a visit to a bookstore on Gediminas Boulevard where several American titles line the best-seller shelves in Lithuanian translations, we headed to an outdoor lunch at Alinė Leičiai, a café near the revered Gate of Dawn religious shrine. A note about Bolt, a shared-ride service like Lyft, that we called that day. Our driver was a student from Ghana. He's been enrolled at Vytautas Magnus University, studying Global Trade for the past year. He gets by but has not formally studied Lithuanian. He commented that Ghanaian students who had to leave Ukraine are now in Vilnius, but their status does not give them the welfare services offered to refugees who are Ukrainian citizens. We encountered a street protest on Gediminas Prospect led by students urging the government to include all refugees in its assistance programs.



A street protest in Vilnius on June 15, 2022

### June 16, 2022

Our last day was jam-packed with activities. The first stop was the National Museum of Lithuania to view a Virtual Reality presentation of the works and music of M. K. Čiurlionis. He was first a composer but switched to painting later in his career. The film is a 30-minute exploration of his haunting and mysterious works while his score, as adapted by Mindaugas Urbaitis, unspooled seamlessly with the images. The VR film is entitled Trail of Angels and was



Kaunas vista on the Nemunas River

created by Kristina Buožytė and Vitalijus Žukas. At the same museum, there is a temporary exhibition showcasing the work of the British artist/poet William Kittredge. His work is bold, innovative, and multi-disciplinary.

At a handsome building that was once the main post office of Kaunas, there is a huge exhibit devoted to the theme “Breaking the wall 1972”. Music, fashion, politics, and articles from the self-immolation of dissident Romas Kalanta on May 14, 1972, were displayed on two floors. Wikipedia states that his funeral procession touched off two full days of rebellion. “Thousands of people took to the streets shouting: ‘Freedom for Lithuania!’. They attacked a police station and the Communist party offices.” The gathered people, mostly high school students and young workers, broke into a politically charged riot, which was forcibly dispersed by KGB, militia, and security forces. The next day, about 3,000 people marched along the Laisvės Alėja of whom 402 were arrested”. The New York Times reported numerous injuries and one death among Soviet troops”.

Stefanija Chreptavičienė, my sister, was an eyewitness to these events. She worked near Laisvės Alėja and, normally, walked along that street to get to her bus stop. She witnessed the funeral march and then later experienced the clamp-down of the city as the Soviet government sought to quell the rebellion. Very little news of the Kaunas confrontation got out to the West. Kaunas was declared a closed city, and no one came in or out. The repression lasted a long time; participants were persecuted for decades. A memorial to Romas Kalanta is set in stone on Laisvės Aleja. For more about him and the Kaunas revolution, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romas\\_Kalanta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romas_Kalanta) and <https://www.baltictimes.com/news/articles/26393/>

After lunch at Miesto Sodas under a welcome parasol on a sunny day, we walked on to the monumental Bank of Lithuania. In its lobby, there is a powerful exhibit by Yoko



Ono. Her connection to Lithuania is through her friend George Maciunas, founder of Fluxus. Her installation “Ex\_It” includes 100 wooden coffins of different sizes, with young trees growing out of them. Ambient recorded sounds of nature can be heard. Yoko Ono’s work evokes the consequences of war or natural disasters.



The Atomic Bunker private collection of KGB memorabilia

In the afternoon, we drove to the Atomic Bunker, a private collection of Julius Urbaitis and his daughter



Yoko Ono also had an exhibit in Kaunas entitled Ex It, featuring native Lithuanian saplings in coffins of varying sizes



Our visit to the Atomic Bunker, a private collection of Cold War artifacts and KGB instruments of repression

Agnė. While the holdings include many artifacts of Lithuanian society, like a pharmacy display counter, a full dental office, and vintage personal items, the KGB material relates to the secret methods used to spy on ordinary Lithuanians. A special tweezer allowed letters to be removed from and restored to envelopes without a trace.

Listening devices, hidden cameras, lipstick guns, and secret recording media are just a few of the tools of the KGB’s repression. Urbaitis started collecting World War II items as a young man; his gas mask collection is probably the largest in the world. We had an English language tour with a guide whose full-time job is at the Kaunas City Museum. This is not an academic museum with labels and other interpretive material but the result of a passionate obsession. For more, visit the Atomic Bunker’s site for English language details: <http://www.atominisbunkeris.lt/en/#apie-mus>

### June 17, 2022

With hearts saddened by departure from our homeland but lifted by a week of close togetherness, we headed to our flights at the airports in Kaunas and Vilnius, vowing to return at the first opportunity.

# Pepito, mi corazon, mi alma - Pepito, my heart, my soul

I have loved all the dogs in my life, but, perhaps, the one I loved the most was my little Pepito.

How did that happen? He came into my life quite by accident and yet, left the most unforgettable imprint on my heart. For many years, I could not even speak about him without crying. Even now, so many years later, as I begin to write his story, tears well up in my eyes and the page becomes blurry. But to anyone who has loved a dog, these pages, I hope, will touch you.



An adoring owner

It was summer, precisely July 15, 1986. My father had died the year before and I was living with my mother in our home in Queens. My mother used to go out to water the lawn in the morning and, that day, she came in and said:

"I saw a little brown dog running down the sidewalk. Maybe you should go and try to catch him. He looks lost."

My mother had a soft heart for animals because she had grown up on a farm and loved horses especially. But we could not have a horse in Queens, nor could we afford one, so we had always had a dog. My father also could not be without a dog and, presently, our third German Shepherd, Lady, was our companion.

So, I got into my car and began driving around the neighborhood without much hope of finding the little brown dog. However, as I rounded one corner, I suddenly saw the little dog run into the backyard of a house. Well, I thought, that must be his home, when suddenly



Pepito portraiture by Ona Dokalskytė-Paškevičienė

I heard children squealing in fright at the sight of what was, presumably, not their dog. So, I stopped my car and started walking into the unknown backyard. A woman came out and I told her that I was looking for the little dog, because I thought he was lost and if she helped me catch him, I would try to locate his owner or find a good home for him. She agreed and went into the yard and in a few minutes came back, holding the little dog wrapped in a towel and gave him to me saying that she wanted her towel back. I said that I would return it.

And so, Pepito made his entry into our lives.

I made sure that I tied a small strip of cloth around his neck as a leash before getting out of the car and took him into our own backyard. My mother was sitting on a chaise lounge on the patio. I tied the little dog to a wrought iron fence so that he would familiarize himself with the yard and the surroundings. He stood there sniffing the air and looking around. He did not seem to want to escape but was simply curious. Then, after closing all the gates, I untied him. He walked around on the patio, looked at my mother seated on the lounge chair and hop! up he went on her lap, made a little circle, lay down, gave a big sigh, closed his eyes, and fell asleep. It was quite amazing. Actually, not really, because dogs always and instantly liked my mother. She was a kind and loving person and they felt it.

So we stayed there, the three of us, on the patio, waiting for our new baby to finish his snooze.



After about twenty minutes, he opened his eyes, looked around and jumped off my mother's lap and began exploring the patio. I looked at him and I could not tell what his breed was. He was so small and so perfectly shaped - he looked like a small fawn. His coat was a golden tan, his nose black, his eyes large and expressive with dark eyebrows which gave him an oddly worried look. I was used to big dogs. As I mentioned, I had had two other German Shepherds before Lady, who was a pure white Shepherd with beautiful black eyes and long black lashes, which I envied.

But this little one, what was he? So, I took out my dog book and flipped through the pages. And there he was - a perfect likeness, a Chihuahua! I had never seen one and once again, was amazed at how small he was. One says that one should never make fun of people's tastes. I had always thought that small dogs were sort of silly, but now, as I looked at him, I began to realize how cute they were - a dog in miniature.



Pepito posing

So, now that I had saved him from the street and the shelter, what to do with him?

We had Lady and we did not know how she would react to this little intruder into her realm. She was already nine years old, set in her ways, and absolutely attached to my mother. She had chosen my mother as her favorite member of the family. I came second but she was always afraid of my father, who tried to overcome her fear (probably from an abusive former male owner) by trying to lure her with small, tasty tidbits of food. She would come gingerly towards him, take the food quickly and retreat just as quickly to my mother's side. My father was genuinely disappointed. Our previous Shepherd, Hector, had been his dog, but not Lady. We decided to test our new companion by bringing out Lady.

She came out, looked surprised, but walked up to him. He retreated a little, but basically stood his ground. There was sniffing and smelling and then everything was quiet. Great! There would be no problem. Lady lay down by my

mother's lounge chair, Pepito hopped on her lap and the family was formed.

We still did not know what to do. We thought we should contact the previous owner because he might be frantic. So, I called the ASPCA and left a description. Within a half hour, a Spanish gentleman called to say that it might be his dog. I gave him my address and he came very quickly. He was very elegant and polite, but as he looked at our little dog, he became sad and shook his head saying it was not his dog. He said that ours looked very young, perhaps not even a year old. He said that his Chihuahua had been much smaller and he had thoughtlessly left him in the yard, and someone had stolen him. He was truly sad.

Our foundling ran away a few times. The fence had big gaps at the bottom and, since he was so tiny, he slipped under them. The first time. I thought he would not come back, because my neighbor said she saw him crossing the main road. But he came back. Then, once again, he found a space in the fence and took off. This time he was gone for four hours. But, as I was in the yard, I saw him wander up the lawn and when he saw me, he made a mad

dash right into my arms!

I called a few of my friends and asked if they wanted a dog, but no one did. So, my mother and I looked at each other and said:

"Why don't we keep him? He is so small and cute. He will not cost much in food."

We would have two dogs - one big and one decidedly small.

Then he needed a name. I had a



Having survived an attack by an Alaskan bear hunter

record of a song by an English pop group and since this dog was of Mexican lineage, we decided that the title of the song - "Pepito" - would suit him. And so Pepito was named!

I could not say if Pepito loved me more than my mother, but I believe he did.

He was still a baby and the first night he jumped into bed with me. I had never slept with a dog, but I soon became used to it. He was small and warm and would curl up against me. If I turned over, he would climb over me so that he could curl up against me again. It took a bit of

getting used to. Since he usually slept under the covers, it would become too warm for him, and he would crawl out from beneath the blanket and huff and puff and try to catch his breath. Then, he would plop down again next to me on top of the covers. A few times, he miscalculated the distance between me and the edge of the bed and would fall onto the floor. But he would shake himself off, and a few seconds later, he would be back by my side. As I said, this constant movement during the night took some getting used to. When winter came, I really welcomed having his warm furry body in my cold bed. My own little foot warmer.

Once only, it was unpleasant. I had given him a bath late in the day and he was not yet completely dry. But routine is routine, and he came to bed still damp. Sleeping with a wet dog... Oh, well, it only happened once.

How he hated baths! It did not start out that way originally. I had a double laundry sink in the basement and I would wash him in one tub and then rinse him in the other. But, as it happened, one time I made the water too hot. As I dipped him in, he yelped, wriggled out of my arms and took off.

After that, I had to use various types of subterfuge to catch him for the process. One time, as I went downstairs with the bottle of baby shampoo and a towel in my hands, he was lying on the bed. He recognized the instruments of torture, realized what was in store and disappeared under



Waiting...

the bed. No coaxing could get him to come out that day. Later, I had to resort to just taking him in my arms and going into my own bathtub, closing the shower doors, and washing him in the tub.

I did not know much about small animals. They were so very different from large ones. I did not know, for example that one should not wash Chihuahuas too often, but, once I learned that, it reduced the stress of the ordeal for Pepito and for me.

So many endearing moments in our life together. I had so many plans. I envisioned, since I like writing, that he

would continually sit on my lap, his head on my arm as I sat at the computer and wrote. He used to actually do this, his head moving up and down with the rising of my arm.

Pepito liked watching television with me. I would sit in my bed and correct papers for my classes. The television would be on. Pepito liked animal and nature shows. One night, as I was marking papers, he sat next to me and was watching an animal show about bears quite intently. At one point, I raised my arm and blocked his view. He pushed my arm out of the way and continued watching. I was amazed! He was actually following the action.

In the winter, when I went to work, Pepito stayed home with my mother and Lady. That was my little family. He knew I would be back at around three-thirty. By two o'clock he would already be sitting on the bay window bench and waiting. It was cold by the window, so he



Little patient

would stay there shivering and shaking, but would not move away from the window. My mother took pity on him and began wrapping him up in a big sweater and that helped stop the shivering. But, no matter what, he stayed there - a little sentinel, watching and waiting. Why cannot humans have more of these wonderful qualities?

In the spring and summer, the gardeners came to tend the lawn. I was not aware that they used poisonous chemicals to kill weeds, so, one time, after they had spread some sort of pesticide and it had rained, Pepito went outside and lapped up some water from a puddle. He became violently ill and went into convulsions. I did not know what to do. I gave him milk, thinking that it might have been from the pesticide. I put him in my bed, covered him up and even brought him a hard-boiled egg. My adorable little patient. I still have a picture of him. He recovered, but I forbade the gardeners to spray the yard anymore.

He was the sweetest dog! When we had company, and since I was always moving, serving, walking, he would set-



tle in on my mother's lap, on the couch and be a part of the evening. If we sat at the dining room table, he would be on my mother's lap as well. She sometimes gave him a tasty morsel from her plate, but not too often. He was very well-behaved, and well-fed, and had good table manners. But, one Christmas Day, a cold and snowy afternoon, we had invited a family friend for dinner but a second guest, who was a bear hunter from Alaska, arrived unexpectedly. Now, I must say, that the very name Alaska always connotes in my mind a very harsh climate and tough people. We sat down for dinner. The hunter watched Pepito with great dislike as he was sitting on my lap at the table. While we were eating, I gave Pepito something from my plate at which, my visitor pushed his chair back in fury and began to stride across the living room. Pepito reacted quickly, jumped off my lap, and began running after him and barking.

The man turned around and kicked him with his heavy hunting boot! He missed, but the second time, he aimed better and kicked again. My little dog went flying into the air with a scream! I ran over to him, scooped him up and saw blood all over him! My immediate thought was that this monster had killed my dog! I took Pepito into my bedroom, put him on the bed and tried to see where the blood was coming from. I was afraid that he might have kicked him in the chest, but then I saw blood pulsating from his paw. The boot had caught his front paw and the force had ripped out his nail. The blood was just gushing out from that little body. I was beside myself. Without even taking my coat, I got into my car, put my doggie all wrapped in bloody towels on the bench seat and began driving. Then I realized I did not know where I was going. Where could I find an emergency veterinarian on Christmas Day? So, I went back into the house and as my two guests were standing by the door. I said to my Alaska monster:

"Please leave my home immediately!"

He looked at me quite puzzled. I repeated my request, and my other friend told him he had to go.

After that I called another friend's husband who came and drove me to a clinic nearby. Fortunately, the young doctor was knowledgeable and kind. He bandaged Pepito's paw and said we were fortunate that we had come, because he would have bled to death. These little dogs do not have a copious amount of blood and he had already lost quite a lot. He also said that men killed these little dogs quite

frequently. Women loved them and they were jealous of the wife's attention and if they were brutes, they killed the dog. Men who can kill a bear would have no qualms about killing a small dog. What an awful ordeal for Pepito and for me. He was a brave little dog and went through it like a trooper. But I will never forget the ride in my friend's car that snowy, cold winter evening, Pepito huddling in my arms, his small body shaking, his blood all over my white towel and soaking through onto my coat. Some men were just so cruel. Thank God not all were like that.

When it came to photography, Pepito was a real ham. He loved being photographed. Perhaps, in his own mind, he knew he was the cutest dog ever.

When I looked at some photos I had taken of friends, there he always was - either his nose sticking out from under an armchair, or he himself under the chair. And when my mother sat at the baby grand and played "Für Elise" he would howl a pitiful little howl. We thought it might be for his former mistress, who, possibly, had played the same tune.

We lived happily for many years. He had his preferences in food as well. Surprisingly, he liked raw carrots and Brie! Cabbage soup was good as well.

Since I did not know that these little dogs had very delicate constitutions, I began feeding him smoked bacon. He became very ill. The veterinarian asked me what I had been feeding him and when I told him, he was very disapproving. He told me that I could only give him chicken and rice or veal and rice. And of course, no chocolate!

We took walks. He even knew the routine. When I went to a certain kitchen drawer to get a little bag, not even the leash, he would know that we were going out. I would



Pepito in his Christmas sweater

ask him: "Shall we go?". The prancing and jumping would start immediately; the running back and forth to the front door; boundless enthusiasm and excitement. One day in the summer, I took him out, but it was a hot day, and after walking a few blocks, he just sat down and would move no more. I had to carry my baby home. I was still adjusting to the fact that he was so tiny and not a strong German Shepherd. In the winter months I would shove him into a colorful sweater but taking the tight sweater off was problematic.

However, during the first years, Pepito would race back and forth in the living room. He was so fast and adorable to watch. Then, he would plop down and sleep for about fifteen minutes and resume his run.

One winter, some relatives came. My cousin was a sportsman and was very proud of his physique. He liked to run every day. Against my better judgment, I let him take Pepito out with him. When he came back, I could see that Pepito was completely exhausted. He could not even jump up on the couch but sat shivering and huddled next to me. I felt his nose. It was hot. I rushed him to the vet. The doctor said that he had gotten pneumonia and that if I had not brought him in, he would have died! I was so angry! My cousin and I had words and, instead of expressing concern or apologizing, he and his son left in a huff, saying their feet would never stand in my home again. So much the better.

I loved my little dog too much. He was so perfectly shaped and beautiful, with those two, little worried brows above his eyes. I even hated to go out, but I sometimes did. When I did go out for the evening, my mother said that Pepito would sit on the living room couch and not move. However, after two a.m., he would sadly go to my bedroom, lie down on my bed and sleep. His devotion touched my heart.

Then, when Pepito was about nine, another relative (we used to call her the wicked witch) called to say that she had found a dog that looked just like mine and wanted to bring it over to show me. I immediately became concerned. I asked her where she had found the dog. She said she had found it in the street. I asked if the dog was sick. She said it that it had a small wound, but that the doctor had taken care of it. I told her not to bring the dog to our home.

However, one day, when I came home from work, I saw her sitting in the living room, the dog in her lap. The dog looked quite ill. Pepito was running around happily, and I had a terrible foreboding thought: What if this dog had

infected mine?

Some months passed and I noticed a certain listlessness in Pepito. He did not jump up on the couch in as sprightly a manner as before; he would curl up against me more often during the day. Then, one night, he jumped up on my bed and began scratching at me with his little paw. I felt around on his body and noticed a hardness on his chest. The next day, I took him to the vet. He sedated him and shaved his chest. And there was a horrible scaly mass on his chest. The doctor said he thought that it might be poison ivy. I expressed surprise: I did not think that dogs were susceptible to poison ivy. He gave me some ointment and a spray and said it would help.

We went back a week later. A scab had formed. The doctor ripped off the scab and I thought Pepito would faint.

My poor baby! He seemed to be getting worse and worse. I decided that I needed to see another doctor who had been highly recommended. After examining Pepito, he came back, looked at me sadly and said:

"I am so very sorry, but I believe your dog has cancer. We will be sure after the biopsy is done tomorrow."

The biopsy confirmed the doctor's suspicions. It was a mast tumor and the doctor said it was unusual for Chihuahuas to develop that type of cancer; bull dogs were prone to it, but not Chihuahuas. The doctor told me that Pepito did not have long to live, that I should feed him, that I should love him. I was beside myself. Love him! He was a part of my soul! I began

to cry uncontrollably. I was still hoping for a miracle, but I knew that I had to prepare myself to part from him. How I hated that woman!

It was a cold winter evening in February. It had snowed in New York eleven times. There were piles of snow everywhere. My mother was as sad and worried as I was. She was grasping at straws and suggested I try one more vet and look for a miracle. I found one in my neighborhood and, once again, my friend's husband drove me. The vet took an x-ray and said he would give Pepito a shot, that it would either help or not. His office was awful. There were dogs left by their owners, who had apparently gone on vacation, and these dogs were in a cold basement, in cages, in the dark. I felt so sorry for them. I wondered if the owners were aware of the dreary housing their pets were in?

The entire scene was one of coldness and unhappiness. I was holding Pepito in my arms when the vet gave him the shot to supposedly help him, my little dog gasped, then became still. He was lifeless in my arms. It was all so



Come back soon



unreal. He was still so warm but was gone. I stood there in shock. What had happened?

I now believe the vet, foreseeing the suffering to come, had given him a shot to actually end his life. I will never know. All I knew then, was that it was all over. I asked the vet to let me take him home. He did not object.

I brought him back. My mother and I cried all night. I put his still warm body on a cart covered it in a soft towel. He was so beautiful in his repose.

The next day, I asked another friend to drive me to Southampton, to a crematorium. The long ride through the cold, snowy landscape, so beautiful in the summer, seemed endless that day. Holding Pepito in my arms, his body no longer warm but stiffening, was the saddest drive in my life.

We came to the crematorium, a dreary, dark place. The helpers looked almost Gothic in their appearance -

ascetic and gloomy. I said goodbye to my beloved sweet dog as I put him on his pink towel. We waited in a coffee shop some distance away. It all comes back to me even today, so many years later, when I pass by that corner. We picked up Pepito's ashes (such a small bag) and drove

home. I could not go to work for three days. The house seemed so empty. Both my mother and I wandered around from room to room; I put his food bowl away because I could not bear to look at it without crying. He had become a part of my soul.

Many years have passed, but I think of him almost every day, and the strangest, yet most comforting occurrence is that when I am under stress, I dream that I am holding him, and I almost feel his warmth. So, perhaps, he is there somewhere, a little sentinel watching over me.

Giedre Kumpikas

East Hampton, August 23, 2022



All bundled up and waiting



A very little dog and a very big pool

# Bring Together Lithuania 2022

Bring Together Lithuania, a summer internship and modern Lithuania program has welcomed the 5th talented generation of Lithuanian diaspora youth in Lithuania.

Created as a program to draw Lithuanian youth diaspora to visit their ancestors' country, Bring Together Lithuania aims to provide youth with opportunities to experience professional life in Lithuania, build lifelong friendships with world Lithuanians, and explore the modern country.

During the summer of 2022, sixteen participants from the US, Canada, Argentina, Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark joined the program. The program offered six weeks of immersive professional experience in leading companies, startups, or organizations. Lithuanian diaspora youth also had an opportunity to travel the country and familiarize themselves with modern Lithuania, its business scene, and its cultural landscape.

Based on their field of study and personal interest, participants interned at NASDAQ Vilnius, Confidentus, Interactio, Oxus.AI, CoinGate, Transparency International, MO Museum, Unnecessary Films, Delta Bioscience, Vilnius University Life Sciences Center (Dr. Urtė

Neniškytė's lab and Dr. Stephen Knox Jones' lab), Vilnius City Public Health Bureau Vilnius Sveikiau, the Capital Basketball School, Caritas, and Vilnius University Geology Department.

The program was initiated and is being sponsored by the Kazickas Family Foundation. The other sponsor is the Lithuanian Foundation, Inc. Since its establishment, the program has grown immensely and expanded its outreach to a broader network of the Lithuanian diaspora and Lithuanian Government. This year, the program was supported by the Ministry of Economy and Innovation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

"The Kazickas Family Foundation is a proud supporter of Bring Together Lithuania, a summer internship program for youth of Lithuanian heritage. We feel it is important for young people to visit the land of their ancestors, have an opportunity to interact with those of their own age, and most importantly, engage in worthwhile programs that expand their knowledge and experience", Jūratė Kazickaitė, the President of the KFF, said.

The preliminary date of the next year's Bring Together Lithuania program is June 10-July 23, 2023. For more information, please visit [www.bringtogether.lt](http://www.bringtogether.lt).



The closing ceremony of the Bring Together Lithuania 2022 in Vilnius, with participants, partners, and supporters



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## Augustė Keršulytė

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At the opening ceremony of Bring Together Lithuania 2022



My favorite trip was the weekend we spent at the Baltic seaside

I've always believed that I had a strong connection with my Lithuanian heritage. Both of my parents were born and lived there for most of their lives, and when they raised my brother and me in the United States, they made sure to immerse us in the culture and language as much as possible. From a young age, we were taught to speak Lithuanian, attended Lithuanian Saturday School, and participated in traditional holidays and events. Additionally, we would travel back to Lithuania every few summers to visit friends and family and to build stronger connections with our roots. Much of my cultural identity was shaped through these experiences.

Still, I always felt that there was a certain individuality missing in my relationship with Lithuania. Every time I traveled back to Lithuania during the summer, I felt like a tourist. I always found myself trailing behind my parents, unfamiliar with the cities, landscapes, and people. I realized that most of the connections I had made with my heritage were attributed to my parents and their efforts to pass on their culture. I was very grateful that they instilled this into me from a young age. However, I soon recognized that I needed to take charge of building bridges with my ancestry. I understood that I needed to learn what Lithuania meant to me on a more personal level.

The Bring Together Lithuania program was the perfect opportunity for me to start this new chapter of cultural connection. For a month and a half, I lived and worked in Vilnius, and for the first time, I was able to visit Lithuania, not as a tourist but, rather, as a resident. By integrating

into the community, I developed a much more complex picture of what Lithuania looks like and what my ancestry means to me. Through the program events, I discovered just how much Lithuania, especially Vilnius, has developed over the years, while still staying true to its roots.

Throughout my life, I never considered living and working in Lithuania as an option. I was raised to always look ahead and focus on my future career, and, in my mind, the United States was the only place where I could start that career. As a third-year student studying Biochemistry in college, learning about the medical and scientific sectors of Lithuania was very important and eye-



Singing Tautiška Giesmė during the Statehood Day

opening to me. Through my internship at the Vilnius University Life Science Center, I discovered all of the new and cutting-edge opportunities in the science field that Lithuania has to offer. I interned at a Neuroscience research lab led by Dr. Urtė Neniškytė, where I worked with the scientists there to gain experience with lab techniques and data analysis. I also gained a new perspective on the overall scientific field, finding similarities and differences in the practice of Biochemistry between the US and Europe. What I valued most from my internship was getting the opportunity to work with and learn from so many different people with different specialties and perspectives, something I wasn't used to in the United States.

Overall, I would definitely recommend the Bring Together Lithuania program to anyone wishing to gain a deeper appreciation for their heritage and establish a new,

more modern connection with Lithuania. Along with living and working in Vilnius, the program also organized trips around Lithuania in order for participants to learn more about their culture. We took trips to Kaunas, Trakai, and my favorite trip was the weekend we spent at the Baltic seaside. Visiting Nida, Klaipėda, and Palanga showed me how beautiful and diverse the country's landscape is and how much history is engrained into the land. One specific memory I have from the trip is having dinner on the water in Klaipėda and then going to dance at the folk-dance festival with the whole group. I have had so many memorable and unique experiences from this program that I know I will remember for the rest of my life. Overall, this program has transformed my perspective of and connection with Lithuania, and I'm already planning my next visit back.

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## Lukas Baumilas

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Exploring Kaunas 2022 - the European Capital of Culture



Hot air balloon flight over Vilnius with Bring Together Lithuania participants

I knew it was a matter of when, not if I would be returning to Lietuva as soon as I left the last time I had been years ago. Šeima, vaikystė, kalba, you name it, the reasons were there. However, as COVID came to be and I found myself getting to be almost halfway done with university, time also felt to be running out. As a business student in Boston, the typical path was framed to me as interning during your summers, working your way up to a job offer after your third-year internship in a big US city. So, that left sophomore summer some wiggle room as to what I could be doing. I would certainly have to occupy myself with professional endeavors. Nevertheless, this

would be one of my last certain chances to spend a summer away from the States to get past due personal affairs in order.

And so, I applied to Bring Together Lithuania, hoping to get all that and more. This summer has been jam-packed with surprises and learning experiences as the different aspects of life for an Amerikos lietuvis collide when overseas. There's so much to learn about yourself when managing family, work, language, friends, and more, with only 24 hours in the day in the country you're increasingly trying to call home. Counting this summer, it's perhaps my fifth time Lietuvoje, and certainly the most surprising



upon re-entry. I spent the first month essentially rediscovering Vilnius, which I thought would be familiar to me as my college campus or hometown on Long Island. Whether the business, demographics, or youth of it all, I was flabbergasted in the best way possible. Bring Together Lithuania put me in a place where I could envision myself staying for even more than a summer.

Along with the inspiring excursions to State representatives, businesses, and tourist attractions, of course, also came my work at Nasdaq Vilnius. I have a mountain of good things to say about my team in the Securities Depository and the greater office on Konstitucijos Street, but I'll sum it up in one word: Acceptance. My greatest concern coming into Lietuva was that no matter how much the offerings of the country appealed to me if I couldn't see myself comfortable working there, then there probably wouldn't be a future. So, as a New Yorker simultaneously trying his best to be a lietuvius, to be accepted for who he was at a NY-based firm in Vilnius, felt remarkable. Whether different cultural differences or the language barrier, which, in my case, I'd think of more as a speed bump, the team was there the whole time with love and grace to allow for the best mutual benefit possible. Thus, I can say Nasdaq has certainly given me the personal and professional confidence that I wanted out of the experience.

If you have the slightest twinge of desire to see Lietuva



Day at the office at Nasdaq Vilnius

through your own eyes, I recommend you take the leap and apply for Bring Together Lithuania. It will be an opportunity to, of course, improve every facet of yourself, even the parts that may not be Lithuanian. The program paints with broad strokes, providing you with a network, opportunities, and time to reach your potential. I do implore you to come in with a plan, however. It may not have to be a concrete idea, but figure out how you will hit the ground running to make the most of the summer here. I will assure you, the time flies by quicker than you think!

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## Tomas Keršulis

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At the Closing Ceremony with the Certificate of Young Ambassador of Lithuania



Meeting the Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė

When I first applied to the Bring Together program five months ago, I did not know what to expect. Normally, I fly to Lithuania every two years to visit family and friends. It is always so fun and interesting to see family that I have not seen in a couple of years and become immersed in

the Lithuanian culture. However, during these trips, I am always simply following my parents around to different places without much input of my own. This summer, I wanted to experience Lithuania from a different perspective, and I thought the Bring Together Lithuania program

would be the perfect opportunity to do so. With this program, I would be able to live on my own and explore Vilnius and Lithuania independently in any way I wanted to do so. In addition to this new experience, I would have the chance to further my academic interest in computer science by working for a Lithuania startup called Oxus.AI. In this way, I believed that the Bring Together Lithuania program would be the perfect opportunity to both – further my knowledge of Lithuania, get more experience in my field, and see whether living in Lithuania would be something I want to do in the future.

I decided to work with Oxus.AI because it is a machine-learning company, a growing field in which I am very interested. At first, I was a little nervous about joining the company because although I already had a few years of computer science and programming under my belt, I only had a few chances to learn about machine learning and never dove deep into it. However, from the first day, I felt welcomed in the company, and each day I gained more and more confidence in my skills. I eventually was able to conduct my own machine learning experiments and contribute to the team. One thing that was interesting about working for Oxus.AI was communicating in Lithuanian with my team members. Although most technical terms are still in English, it was very educational and



With Bring Together Lithuania participants Tomas Bublīs and Lukas Baumilas at the networking event

interesting for me to have conversations about computer science and programming in Lithuanian that I otherwise have only had in English my entire life. I believe that these conversations helped me become better at the Lithuanian language and gave me the confidence to come back and work in Lithuania in the future.

I would recommend the Bring Together Lithuania program to any Lithuanian living in a different country. Not only did it give me the chance to experience the Lithuanian



AVG visit and meeting with Vygaudas Ušackas



culture and work, but it gave me opportunities that many Lithuanians who live in the country told me they have not had. For example, we got the opportunity to go to countless ministries and companies and even meet members of the Parliament and the Government. We were able to introduce ourselves, speak to, and learn from important public figures, which is an opportunity that most people do not get. As a group, we visited many different companies that showed us the environment of the workplace in Lithuania and made a huge impression on me. The companies were all so welcoming and truly cared about their

employees. Not only this, but we got the opportunity to make friendships with other members of the program and do so many fun things that I have never done before. I flew in a hot air balloon over Vilnius where we saw incredible views of the city and we went kayaking as a group through the Neris River. We would all go to dinners together, celebrate people's birthdays together, and play all sorts of different games together. These are experiences that I would not have had here in Lithuania without the Bring Together Lithuania program, and for that, I am so thankful for this program and am so grateful that I decided to join it.

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## Tomas Bublīs

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During the summer internship worked at the Sostinės Krepšinio Mokykla



In Trakai with Bring Together Lithuania 2022 participants

*Labas!* I'm Tomas, and I was born in the Šilainiai district of Kaunas, Lithuania in 2002. When I was only nine months old, my parents won a green card and decided to move to the United States to pursue a better life and provide more opportunities for my brother and me. I grew up in New Jersey and would only travel to Lithuania every few summers to visit family and friends and explore different parts of the country. I always looked forward to going back to Lithuania because it is a major part of my identity. From spending time with family in Kaunas to visiting Sodas to going to the beach by Palanga, to eating *cepelinai*, being in Lithuania gave me a feeling like no other. With each visit to Lithuania, I fell more and more in love with the country and realized how lucky I am to be Lithuanian.

Although I grew up in the United States, the Lithuanian culture was instilled in me from the start. My parents did a tremendous job of surrounding me with Lithu-

anian culture and ensuring that my brother and I would never drift away from our Lithuanian identities. This included only speaking Lithuanian at home, eating Lithuanian food, celebrating holidays according to Lithuanian traditions, and being a part of the Lithuanian community through choir and dance groups. I cannot thank my parents enough for their efforts in my Lithuanian upbringing and for helping me to develop my pride in the country.

I chose to spend my summer in Lithuania because I saw it as an opportunity to independently explore Lithuania, while also gaining valuable professional experience. After hearing about the program from a family friend and alumni of Bring Together Lithuania, I knew it was an opportunity I could not pass up. I was intrigued by the prospect of exploring the various regions of Lithuania and learning more about my Lithuanian roots because although Lithuania is a small country with only three million people, it always surprises me with its beauty and cul-

tural opportunities. Not to mention, the idea of living and working in Lithuania is something that I never imagined and never thought would emerge as an opportunity. After spending six weeks in Lithuania, the Bring Together Lithuania Program has exposed me to the immense progress that the country has made over time. It has really given me joy to see the direction that Lithuania and its people are headed with regard to professional, cultural, social, and economic opportunities. A bright future awaits Lithuania and its people, and I hope to be able to contribute to this future through my own endeavors.

Currently, I am a rising junior at Syracuse University in Upstate New York, studying health and exercise science with a minor in nutrition. My passion for exercise stems back to my childhood, as I played competitive basketball and football from the 3rd grade all the way through high school. Through my athletic endeavors, I have developed a passion for exercise and working with athletes. At Syracuse, I am an athletic training student intern for the SU football team and shadow their sports medicine staff. Coming to Lithuania, I knew I wanted to work with athletes, more specifically, basketball athletes. Basketball is considered a second religion in Lithuania and has played a major role in my life. Growing up in a Lithuanian



Meeting the LavTwins



At the Centre for Civic Education

household, I was exposed early on to the game of basketball and developed a strong passion for it. I vividly remember watching countless Olympic, European, and World Championship games with friends and family, while looking up to the likes of many Lithuanian basketball greats such as Linas Kleiza, Šarūnas Jasikevičius, Šarūnas Marčiulionis, and, of course, Arvydas Sabonis. Through the Bring Together Lithuania Program, I have been able to work with the Sostinės Krepšinio Mokykla, which for the fourth year in a row was voted the best basketball school in all of Lithuania. Working with SKM, I have had the opportunity to gain professional experience with athletes alongside many renowned Lithuanian coaches such as Tomas Purlys, Arvydas Gronskis, Tomas Urbelionis, Karolis Čyžius, and Egidijus Ženevičius. It has been an amazing experience to share my love for basketball with the Lithuanian youth and help them become better basketball players because it is a part of our Lithuanian blood.

Bring Together Lithuania provides an incredible opportunity to discover Lithuania and network with prominent figures in the business, political, medical, technological, and cultural fields. Every meeting and networking event has a unique component that demonstrates how much Lithuania has to offer and the amazing people that strive to make Lithuania a better place to work and live. Through our various road trips and adventures, we have been able to explore Lithuania's diverse beauty and rich history. Bring Together Lithuania provides countless opportunities to see the dynamic of Lithuanian culture. Some of my favorite activities were visiting the Baltic Seaside, going back to my hometown of Kaunas, singing tautiška giesmė on Statehood Day, and meeting with the First Lady Diana Nausėdienė. We were exposed to so many different groups, companies, and people who all played a part in enhancing our understanding of Lithuania's wide range of opportunities and future in



various professional and political fields.

The Bring Together Lithuania Program has truly been a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me. I couldn't have asked more. I was able to make new friendships, strengthen my professional network and experience, learn more about Lithuanian culture and history than I could have ever imagined, and see the immense progress that Lithuania has made. Most importantly, I was able to expand my Lithuanian identity and grow my love for the country. The Bring Together Lithuania program is special because it is made up of Lithuanian diaspora from all

around the world who have the same desire to strengthen their Lithuanian roots and get valuable professional experience. I truly recommend this program to anyone looking to enhance their Lithuanian roots, gain valuable professional experience, and experience a true Lithuanian Summer full of adventures. I would like to give a very special thanks to Kamilė Perminė and the rest of the Bring Together Lithuania team for giving me the opportunity to rediscover Lithuania and all that it has to offer. Lithuania is a special place with so much to offer, and I encourage everyone to become a part of Bring Together Lithuania!

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## Benediktas Gaškevičius

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During the Bring Together Lithuania trip to Trakai



During the opening ceremony of the Bring Together Lithuania 2022

Hello, my name is Benediktas Gaškevičius, or Ben/Benas for short. I am a Geology and Seismology student from Michigan. Despite living most of my life in the United States, I still have very strong Lithuanian roots, and it has been a dream come true to come back to Lithuania and participate in the fantastic Bring Together Lithuania 2022 program. Although I have not been as involved in my Lithuanian heritage group as much as I should have over the majority of my life in Michigan, the recent pandemic provided a unique opportunity for a lot of freedom in my schedule, which I took advantage of and delved deeper into what I've been missing out on in my Lithuanian community at the Divine Providence Church and Lithuanian Heritage Community center near Detroit.

I can trace my first pique of interest in geology back to around 2015, when I went to Yosemite National Park,

and pulled a flake of granite off a boulder. I remember looking at it without really knowing what I was looking at and being mesmerized by what I now know to be quartz, feldspar, micas, and hornblende. My next brush with geology struck upon enrolling in Wayne State University Environmental Science Program. I didn't feel like I had too much direction in life, and I picked whatever I felt was the most interesting. In this program, I had to go through a rigorous Mineralogy course, after which I knew I had found my calling. From there, I switched over to a geology major, and I finished my course requirements for a Bachelor's degree, topping them off with a Field Camp outing to Iceland during the period of eruption of the Fagradalsfjall volcano in the Reykjanes Peninsula. I then continued on to pursue a Master's degree in the field of Seismology, also with WSU.

I first learned of the Bring Lithuania Together program in 2020 at the Divine Providence church in Michigan. I'd like to attribute this partly to the pandemic since the free time I found from the initial lack of work and in-person university meetings spurred me to look for interesting ways to occupy my time. My parents recommended that I join the tautiniai šokiai dance group that practiced at Divine Providence in preparation for the Folk Dance Festival that was going to be held in Philadelphia that year. I agreed and began to attend the practices, and during my time there I saw a poster for the Bring Together Lithuania program. I eagerly applied, but was not able to go in 2020 due to the onset of the pandemic, and missed it in 2021 as well due to having to complete my field camp requirements for my Bachelor's degree. Luckily, in 2022 I finally saw an opportunity and was able to arrange for a couple of months in the summer to attend the program.

I wholeheartedly recommend that anybody who has

Lithuanian roots is a college student in our current recovering academic climate, and has the means to make it to Lithuania in the coming years look into this program. While here, I planned to make connections within the Geology Department here at Vilnius University and am just now realizing how invaluable those connections may become in the future. I was able to visit the core housing facility nearby Vilnius and see the massive amounts of core data that have been collected over the decades, all brought together under one roof. I was also given the opportunity to see some of the bright up-&-coming geology students at VU and went on a couple of outings with them to see how the learning process works for similar students in the same field of study but a completely different part of the world. Aside from my time at Vilnius University, I spent time with a great group of other students from around the world that were part of the Bring Together Lithuania 2022 program. We were given

the opportunity to meet with many of the leading companies in different industries and learn about their work, we met with government institutions and were given insights about how Lithuania functions inside and outside of the country, and about how bright the future for Lithuania is. We did not spend all our time in meetings though, as we also had the chance to partake in activities such as kayaking down the Neris River, hot air ballooning over Vilnius, and having a relaxing and inspiring weekend at the amazing beaches of Palanga.

I can honestly say that the experience I had in the summer of 2022 with this program has shifted my life significantly and has inspired me. I feel like my view of the world has widened, and I feel like I have more intuition about how things work outside the borders of where I spent the majority of my life. I obviously have a long way to go, but I genuinely feel like I've taken a small step towards the horizon of having a more worldly view and seeing the opportunity that exists in other parts of the globe. After this program ends, I will be left with a deeper connection to my heritage and the family that I have in Lithuania, overseas connections in academia and business, and newfound confidence in what the world around me has to offer.



Kayaking in Vilnius



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## Katrina Barauskas

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Moments from the internship at Caritas Vilties Angelas



At the Centre of Civic Education, the Presidential Palac

My name is Katrina Barauskas. I was born and raised in Michigan. My grandparents came from Lithuania to the United States when they were around four years old. Their parents (my great-grandparents) ran away to escape WWII. I am so lucky that my parents kept our Lithuanian heritage alive as they raised me and my siblings. I attended Lithuanian school every Saturday, went to Lithuanian scout camp and Lithuanian heritage camp, played basketball with the Detroit Kovas, went to mass at our parapija, am part of the folk dance group, and even was a teacher at the Lithuanian school after I graduated.

I decided to come to Lithuania this summer because each of the times that I've visited, I had the most amazing experience. I really wanted to be part of Bring Together Lithuania because I wanted to experience working in Lithuania. I love that Bring Together Lithuania allows Lithuanians around the world to come together and experience not only Lithuania but what it is like working here. It is super neat that everyone gets to work in their own field of study/what interests them. As a teacher at a Catholic school back home, this summer I've got the opportunity to work with the Vilties Angelas, an organization that works with underprivileged youth. I met so many amazing kids who were all so sweet and full of energy.

I highly recommend applying for Bring Together Lithuania for any college student and recent graduate.

We met so many businesses, executives, and even the First Lady. We participated in discussions, met various businesses, and experienced working in Lithuania firsthand. There are so many opportunities for networking and making connections, and I am so grateful to have been a part of it!



Moments from the internship at Caritas Vilties Angelas, working with kids

# Knights of Lithuania - Maspeth Vyčiai Honor Ukraine

By Dr. Paul-Michael Kazas  
President, Knights of Lithuania, Council 110  
President, Union Chapter 37, Local 375,  
District Council 37

Symbols are important because they represent what one honors, supports, and believes in. From the American and Lithuanian Flags to the Statute of Liberty to the Cross, these emblems, among others, invoke the righteous, while other symbols can represent pure hatred and evil.

The people of Ukraine share a special bond and history with Lithuania. During these dangerous times, Ukraine is fighting for its survival and the survival of the Baltic States, Poland, Europe, and, yes, the United States. We must not waiver in aiding Ukraine's freedom.

The Hon. Gitanas Nausėda, President of the Republic of Lithuania, stated that he wished for Ukraine's victory, which will surely happen because Ukrainians deserve it. On Wednesday, August 24, 2022, Ukraine celebrated the 31st year of its regained independence from the Soviet Union and marked the six-month anniversary since it was invaded by Putin's Russia on February 24, 2022. To pay tribute to Ukraine and those who are sacrificing so much, the Knights of Lithuania/Maspeth Vyčiai, with support from Union Chapter 37 and Local 375 of District Council 37, made an official request to honor Ukraine by having the Kosciuszko Bridge in New York City lit in the Ukrainian national colors, blue and yellow.

Special appreciation is extended to the Hon. Joseph P Addabbo Jr., NYS Senator, who is a true friend and supporter of Lithuania, Ukraine, and all free, independent, and democratic republics. Senator Addabbo had reached out to NYS Governor Hon. Kathy Hochul, who supports the precepts of freedom and democracy and agreed to have the Kosciuszko Bridge become a symbol for Ukraine so that the world can witness its Independence Day.

The Knights and Union Chapter 37 extend the deepest appreciation to both, Senator Addabbo and Governor Hochul, who further honored the people of Ukraine. We were informed that Governor added 13 additional sites throughout New York State to pay tribute to Ukraine on its Independence Day.

Let us not forget that, along with many others, the Union Movement with Lech Walesa in Poland was a major force in helping to bring down Communist Russia.

The Knights of Lithuania's support for Ukraine is steadfast. The organization's National President Regina Juška-Švoba, HM amplified the Knights' support by noting that

the members of the Knights of Lithuania continue to watch the travesty occurring in Ukraine. The plight of the Ukrainian people is one we can all appreciate as the illegal aggression inflicted upon them by Russia; it is all too familiar aggression imposed upon our beloved Lithuania by Russia not too long ago.

May we continue to keep our Congressional and Senatorial Representatives informed of the displeasure with Russia's actions in Ukraine and the continued need for the United States to offer all support possible to Ukraine. President Juška-Švoba continued by stating that Russia cannot be allowed to succeed in Ukraine. Their next step



From the left: Michael Troman, President of Local 375, DC 37, Senator Joseph P Addabbo Jr., and Dr. Paul-Michael Kazas, President of Maspeth Vyčiai and Chapter 37, Local 375, DC 37I



Consuls expressed their support to the people of Ukraine at the Polish Consulate during Polish-Lithuanian Constitution Day.



Adrian Kubicki, Consul General of Poland



Oleksii Holubov, Consul General of Ukraine



Vaclovas Šalkauskas, Consul General of Lithuania

against the freedom-loving people of Europe is too horrendous to imagine. Through the support of independent nations throughout the world and by the grace of God, we pray that Ukraine is victorious. We stand together with Ukraine - Mes esame kartu su Ukraina. Slava Ukraine.

Evil is cancer that kills everything and everyone within its path. What we do and what we fail to do matters. Failure is not an option for Ukraine, for should Ukraine falter, the grasp of Putin's Russia had already declared that Lithuania and Poland are next. Putin further stated that both countries belong to Russia, and they should never have been allowed to become Catholic.

In response to this tremendous gesture of support for Ukraine, the Hon. Oleksii Holubov, Consul General to Ukraine in New York, wrote: "Dear Dr. Paul-Michael Kazas, I write to cordially thank you, certainly along with NYC Senator Joseph P Addabbo Jr., for your solidarity with my country

and support rendered to Ukrainians. Indeed, lighting famous NYC construction, including the Kosciuszko Bridge, in the colors of the State Flag of Ukraine sends a very strong message of unity with the democratic world we Ukrainians need today, and we truly appreciate that. Wishing you peace and the best as well as extending my kind regards."

The Knights/ Maspeth Vyčiai calls upon the righteous to join forces to retain, celebrate, and honor our cultures and stop the evil that has metastasized across the world. The Knights of Lithuania/Vyčiai invites those who support Lithuania and all free, independent, and democratic republics to join us in our mutual quest for God and Country.

The Knights of Lithuania is located at many sites throughout the United States. The Knights of Lithuania/Maspeth Vyčiai is located at the historic Transfiguration Church in Queens, New York.

For information, you can contact Dr. Paul-Michael Kazas at 87-28 97th Street, Woodhaven, New York 11421, or 929-351-0367.

God bless America, Lithuania, Ukraine, and all free, independent, and democratic republics.



The Kosciuszko Bridge on August 24th, Ukraine's Independence Day.

## current events

### Security

After a month of restricting the flow of certain goods to Kaliningrad, the European Union altered its rules to allow rail transport of these same goods but maintained the ban via road. At least 11 trucks were turned back from Belarus and Kaliningrad. Per the EU, Lithuanian Railways will now permit the transit of steel, other ferrous metals, concrete, wood, and alcohol through the EU territory to Kaliningrad for the needs of the enclave. In response to the restrictions, Russia threatened to retaliate, including a ban on the movement of goods between Russia and the Baltic nations.

China lodged a strong protest against Lithuania for welcoming a Taiwanese delegation, claiming it violated the one-China policy. Vilnius and Taipei say that they are developing economic and cultural ties and do not have formal diplomatic relations. You Si-kun, the speaker of the Taiwan Parliament and head of the delegation, said the visit was a way to express our gratitude to Lithuania for opening the representative office. You said, "We are impressed with Lithuania's courage and support for democracy".

The Lithuania Seimas ratified and President Gitanas Nausėda signed the Protocols on Finland and Sweden's accession to join NATO. Both became NATO partners in 1994 when they joined the Partnership for Peace program. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, they applied for NATO membership on May 18. On July 5, all 30 NATO member countries signed the Protocol on Finland and Sweden's accession.

Lithuania has contracted with the British shipyard, Harland & Wolff, for a 55 million overhaul of the former Royal Navy mine-hunting vessel, HMS QUORN. The overhaul will add new sonar, search and rescue capability, engines, generators, propulsion gear, and electrical system, as well as improved accommodations and paint job.

Lithuanian, Polish, the US, Romanian, and British troops participated in live-fire exercises near Alytus in south-eastern Lithuania, in the vicinity of the Suwalki Gap between Belarus and Kaliningrad.

### Ukraine

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called Lithuania Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis to thank Lithuania for its initiative and involvement at the international level in addressing the issue of unblocking Ukrainian ports and grain exports.

Lithuania joined forty-three countries and the European Union to intervene in Ukraine's case against Russia at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. Lithuania suggested that the international community consider setting up a special tribunal on Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

### Covid-19

The World Health Organization reports that the number of Covid-19 cases in Europe tripled in July due to more contagious sub-variants. The fourth dose of the Covid-19 vaccine is available for immunocompromised people.

In late July, Lithuania had a day rate of 1,279 cases of Covid-19 and one death. There are 126 hospitalized patients, with 4 in the ICU. These numbers are a vast improvement over early February when the daily rate was 14,000. More than 1.1 million Lithuanians have tested positive at least once.

### Business

Taiwan's YesHealth Group has invested 6 million euros in Leafood to develop a vertical farm in Vilnius which is projected to be able to supply 1,000 kg of leafy greens per day. The automated system using hydroponics and gel is projected to grow more food in smaller spaces, cut water use, and reduce the need for pesticides and fertilizers. Initially, the farm will grow various types of lettuce and herbs, with later expansion to include berries and vegetables. Wind and solar systems will supply the energy to power the fluorescent lights, LED panels, water pumps, and fans for circulating air.





The bankruptcy administrator for Lithuania's Snoras bank will receive 105 million euros from Switzerland's Julius Baer Bank in settlement over financial transactions by Snoras' former executives and shareholders when they transferred large amounts of money to foreign banks.

Lithuania's State Energy Regulatory Council stripped Inter RAO Lietuva, a group owned by Russian energy giant Inter RAO, of its electricity export, import, and independent supplier licenses. The company is on the list, published by the Financial Crime Investigation Service, of Lithuanian companies subject to sanctions imposed on Russia and its oligarchs. It failed to inform the Council of its financial capability to continue operations.

The Lithuanian state-owned energy group Ignitis Grupė Renewables division will invest 70 million euros to build a 50 MW wind farm in southwestern Poland. They plan on installing fourteen 3.6 MW wind turbines from Nordex, which is expected to generate 122 GWh per year. It is scheduled to open in the last quarter of 2023.



The Renewables group also plans to invest 200 million euros into a 252 MW solar park in the Jonova District in central Lithuania. The plan is to generate electricity by 2025. Currently, Renewables has 650 MW capacity and plans to have 4000 MW capacity by 2030.

The US Department of Energy and the Lithuanian Ministry of Energy have signed a bilateral agreement relating to energy cyber security, making the energy sector more resistant to climate change challenges and transitioning its energy sector to 100 % renewable by 2050.

## General

A US Staff Sergeant Robert Magallian, 29, died when his car fell off the middle of a drawbridge into the Dane River in Klaipeda. He was a member of the Signal Brigade from

Fort Hood, Texas, stationed in Latvia and was driving a rental VW Tiago when the accident occurred at 0:45. At the time, the bridge was up, a barrier was down, and warning lights were flashing. A nearby camera shows the car breaking through the barrier and plunging into the river. According to NATO, there are about 3,700 allied NATO troops in Lithuania in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

President Gitanas Nausėda attended the Lithuanian Folk Dance Festival in Philadelphia and took the opportunity to meet with the Pennsylvania National Guard Adjutant General Major General Mark Schindler at the First Troop, Philadelphia City Cavalry Armory. Lithuania and the PA National Guard have participated in the State Partnership Program since 1993. He also visited Independence Hall, met Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney, and visited the Philadelphia home of Revolutionary Military Engineer Tadas Kosciuszka. He also met with the founder and CEO of Holtec from Mt. Laurel, New Jersey, with headquarters in Jupiter, Florida. Holtec specialized in handling nuclear fuel and waste disposal, nuclear plant decommissioning, and the design and manufacture of parts for nuclear reactors.

Statistics Lithuania estimated the June 2021-June 2022 inflation rate at 20.5%, with major increases in the price of food, non-alcoholic beverages, housing, water, electricity, gas, and fuel.

Inflation is not the only money problem. The Bank of Lithuania removed 449 counterfeit euro banknotes and 109 counterfeit coins worth 35,000 euros in bills and 200 euros in coins. These catches were 5 % more in banknotes and three times more in coins than in 2021 but below the catches in 2020. The most common counterfeit denominations were 20 and 50 euros. The Bank advises recipients to check the money they receive with the 'feel-look-turn' method, that is, pay attention to the quality of the paper, the watermark, the security thread, the hologram, and the box with the portrait of Europe.



# The perfect apple cake that just never fails

You will need:

180 g (6.35 oz) of very cold butter

280 g (10 oz) flour

50+150-80 g (1.7+5.3+2.8 oz) sugar

cinnamon

500 g (17.5 oz) 9 % fat farmer's cheese

3 eggs

7-9 large apples (quantity depends on the size of your baking dish)



First, peel the apples and remove the seeds.

Then whisk the eggs with 10 tablespoons of sugar, add the cottage cheese, and stir together. Use drier farmer's cheese because if the cheese is a bit on the wetter side, the cake might be runny.

When the cheese is ready, cut the cold butter into small pieces mixing it with flour. Finish by rubbing it in with my fingers until you get crumbles. The most important thing is not to leave any large lumps of butter. Then add sugar to the crumbs and keep tasting, it should be sweet enough but not too sweet.

Divide the crumbs into two piles, one slightly larger than the other. Put the larger part of the crumbs on the bottom of the baking dish, and spread evenly, then put the farmer's cheese mix on top of the crumb base. On top of the cheese, put sliced-thinly apples (if you like your apples to turn into applesauce during the baking process, grate the apples with a beetroot grater). Sprinkle the apples with cinnamon and a little more sugar (the amount depends on the tartness of the apples). Once this is done, top the cake with a thin layer of the remaining crumbs.

Preheat the oven to 180 degrees C (350 degrees F) and bake the cake for an hour on the lowest rack so that the bottom bakes well. The cake tastes best after it has cooled down or even the next morning when you take it out of the fridge.

Source: <https://www.beatosvirtuve.lt/receptai/vilmos-ubuoliu-ir-varskes-pyragas/>

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