

bridges



LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

December 2023

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NEWS JOURNAL

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Dear all,

If we complement our ideas, goals, and hopes with indomitable determination, if we wrap them in strong bonds of community, and if we put them into practice with perseverance, we will surely create a miracle.

On this Christmas and New Year's Eve, I thank each of you for your meaningful deeds and significant achievements.

May the coming year be another step towards our success and may the experiences of the past be inspiration for new ideas.

Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Arvydas Urbonavičius
Lithuanian American Community
President

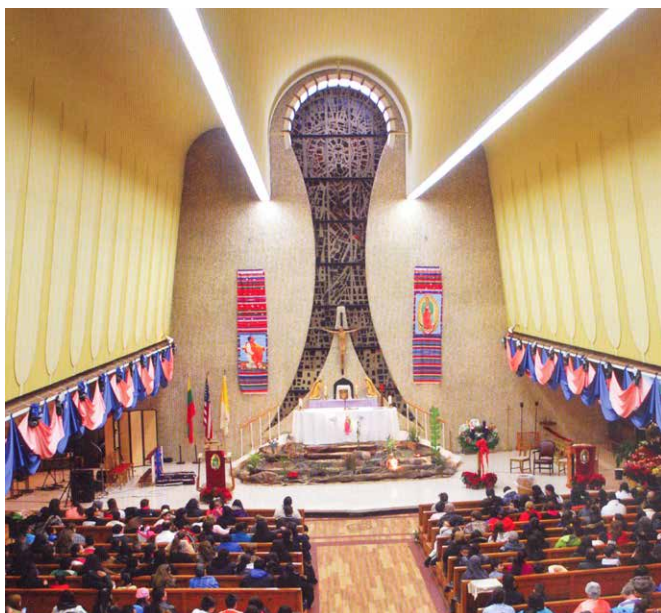
HISTORY OF CHICAGO LITHUANIAN CHURCHES

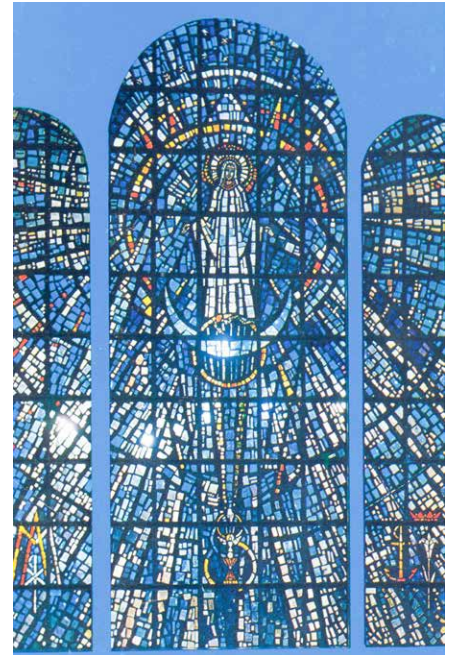
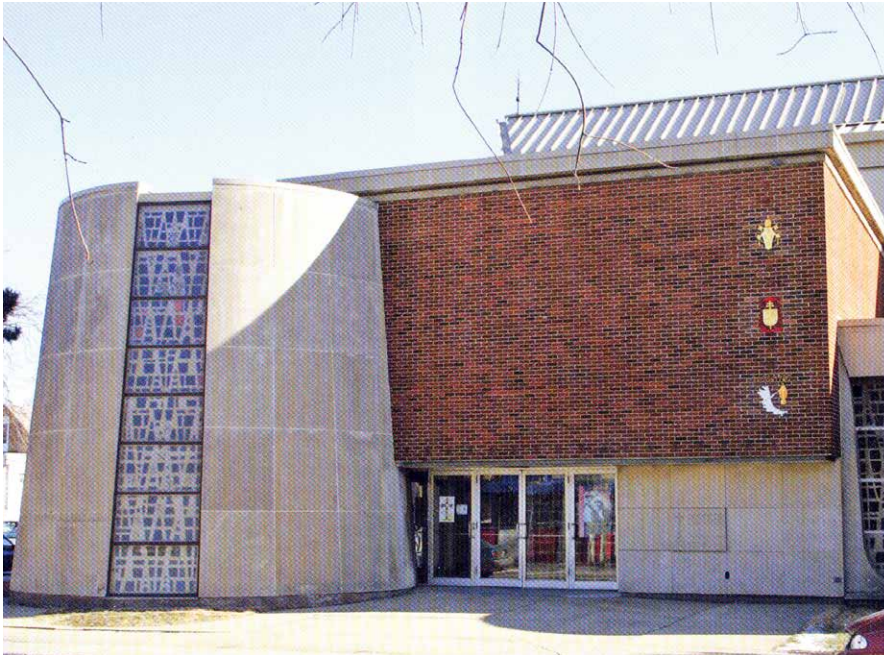
Nekalto Prasiđėjimo - Immaculate Conception

2745 W. 44th Street, Chicago, IL
Organized in 1914 - still open in 2020

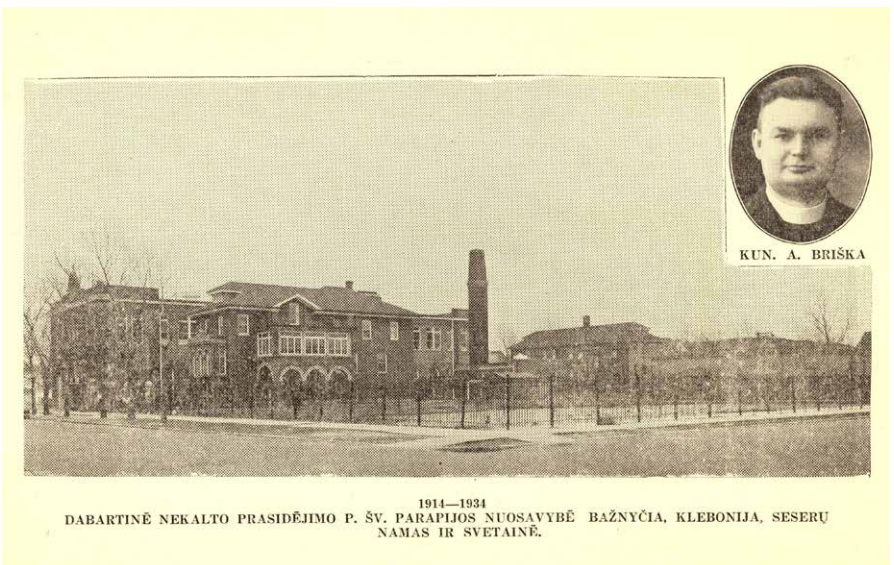
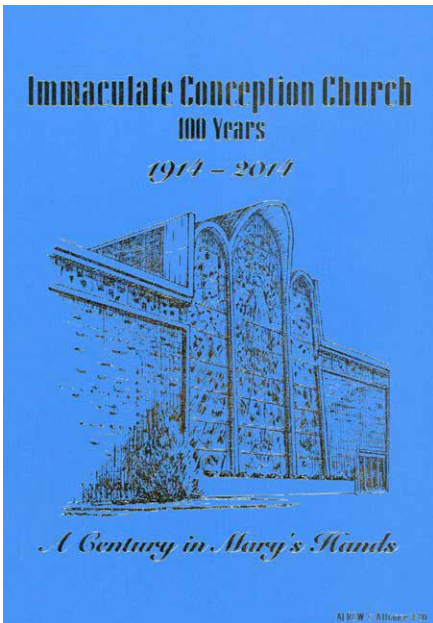
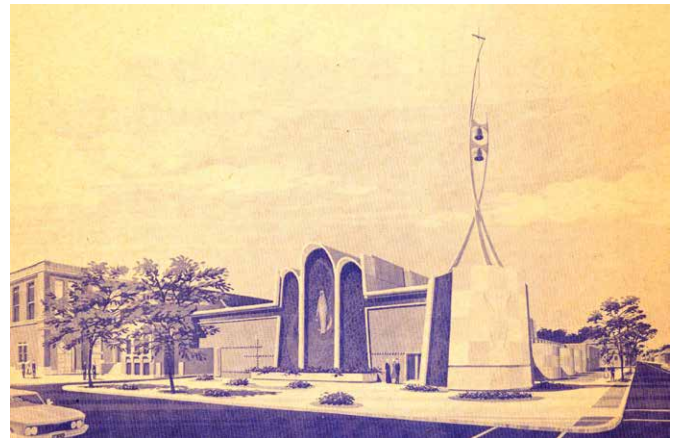
The parish was organized on September 10, 1914. In 1915 the construction of a combined church, school, and rectory began. In 1964 a new, modernist church was built. It includes numerous Lithuanian details in its interior, among which the most striking are the Our Lady of Šiluva shrine in a side-chapel, Divine Mercy Shrine (based on the painting in Vilnius) in the other side-chapel, and the Our Lady of Šiluva stained-glass window. The opening of the church coincided with the season of the parish golden jubilee. When the parish celebrated its diamond jubilee in 1989, it counted 1200 families of whom only a third could claim Lithuanian roots. Digitized baptism, marriage, and deaths records for the years 1914-1915 are available online.

Brighton Park district west of former stockyards is now also largely Hispanic but its modernist Lithuanian Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (built in 1964, 2745 W. 44th St.). It includes numerous Lithuanian details in its interior, among which the most striking are the Our Lady of Šiluva





shrine in a side-chapel, Divine Mercy Shrine (based on the painting in Vilnius) in the other side-chapel, and the Our Lady of Šiluva stained-glass-window that is colored in the colors of the Lithuanian flag. The rest of the stained-glass windows also have Lithuanian donors written on them; the windows are not the traditional light European-style but rather they are made of large single-colored chunks of glass. Brighton Park Lithuanian church is the last-to-be-built among the Lithuanian-constructed churches of Chicago and the only one built after the Vatican II council which made the preferred church plans more open.



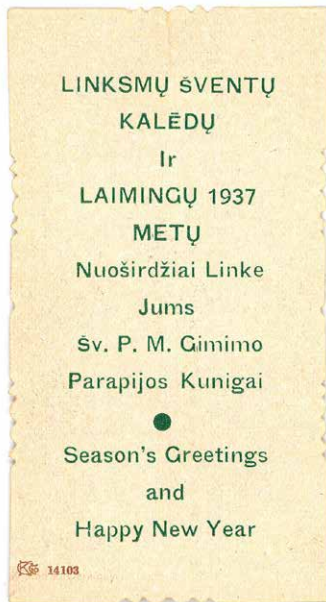
1914—1934
DABARTINĖ NEKALTO PRASIDĖJIMO P. ŠV. PARAPIJOS NUOSAVYBĖ BAŽNYČIA, KLEBONIJA, SESERŲ NAMAS IR SVETAINĖ.

Marijos Gimimo - Nativity BVM

6812 S. Washtenaw Ave., Chicago, IL
Organized in 1927 – Open in 2020

In the 1920s the present-day Marquette Park neighborhood was still largely an uncultivated tract of land. Area Lithuanians worshiped either at Holy Cross or Immaculate Conception. Then in 1927, Fr. Aleksandras Baltutis organized Nativity BVM Parish, and in 1929 a church was built. In 1957 a new magnificent church according to the design of Jonas Mulokas was built. In 1970 the federal census indicated some 25,000 of foreign birth in the Chicago Lawn section that included Marquette Park, embracing 7,718 Lithuanian-born. The church is still open today even though the number of parishioners greatly diminished in the last thirty years.

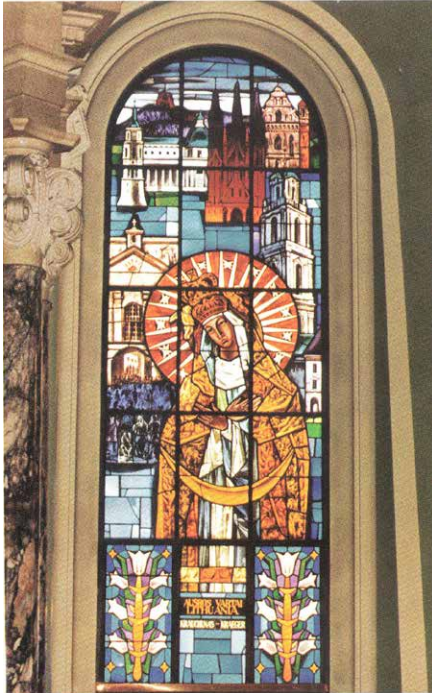
Since those times, a large 1957 Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (B.V.M.) towers over the district. It combines post-war architectural austerity with pre-war size, both historicist and unique ethnic Lithuanian details. Initially criticized by some, this joint work of architect Jonas Mulokas and interior designer V. K. Jonynas was eventually praised and set the style for later Lithuanian-American churches.



Lithuanian Mass is celebrated there. Everything in the church's architecture tells of the longing for their lost homeland.

On the outside, the tricolor is always waving, while the church's sidewalls are adorned by two historical mosaics: "The coronation of King Mindaugas" and "Miracle of St. Casimir at the River Daugava" (author Dalia Juknevičiūtė-Mackuvienė). While having religious connotations enough to put them on the church, the deeper meaning of both is symbolic patriotically: Mindaugas was the first Lithuanian king recognized as such by Western powers (as he was the first Christian king), while the St. Casimir's miracle involved





Easter Morning
from Painting by Ploekhorst.

LINKSMŲ ŠVENTŲ VELYKŲ
ŠV. PANĖLĖS MARIJOS GIMIMO PARAPIJOS
1940 M. KALĖDŲ AUKOS

A JOYOUS EASTER
NATIVITY B. V. M. PARISH CHICAGO, ILL.
1940 CHRISTMAS OFFERINGS

him appearing as a young soldier in front of the Lithuanian troops in 1518, showing these troops where to cross Daugava river without drowning so they could ambush and defeat the

GIMIMO ŠVČ. MERGELĖS MARIJOS PARAPIJOS 50-ties METŲ JUBILIEJUS

Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish 50th Anniversary

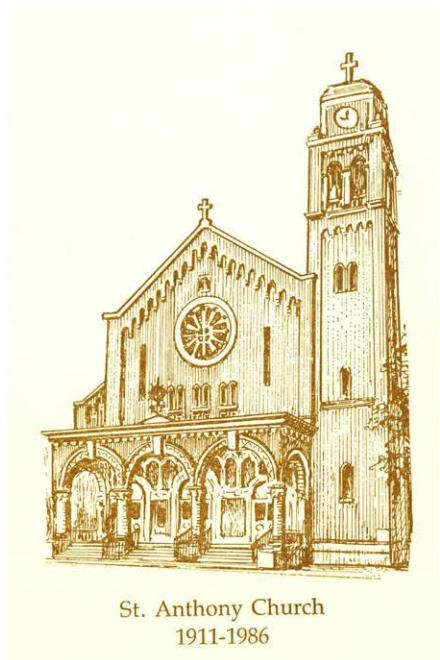
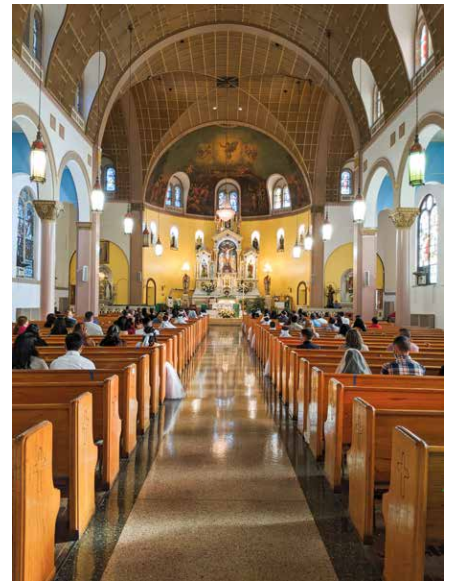


Russians. Both themes - continued foreign recognition of Lithuanian statehood and the victory over the (Soviet) Russian occupants - were extremely important to Lithuanian-Americans back in the 1950s.

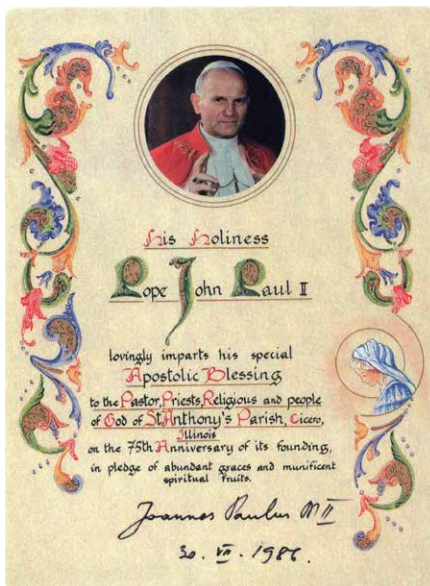
Šv. Antano - St. Anthony's

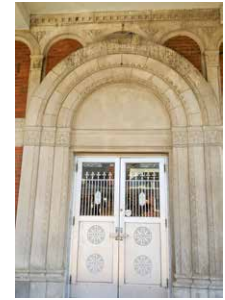
1515 S. 50th Ave., Cicero, IL

Lithuanians settled in the town of Cicero at the end of the 19th century. At first, they worshiped at St. Attracta Parish. On August 10, 1910, they passed property papers to the archdiocese, and by 1911, they established a separate parish. The current St. Anthony of Padua RC church has been opened in 1925. On June 13, 1926 Archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis provided the blessing of dedication. In the early 1950s, the parish had 3,000 members of the early immigrants and their children, plus 1,000 DPs.



St. Anthony Church
1911-1986





CATHOLIC NEW WORLD 5-11-03

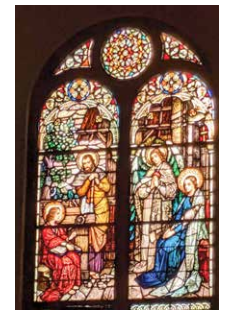
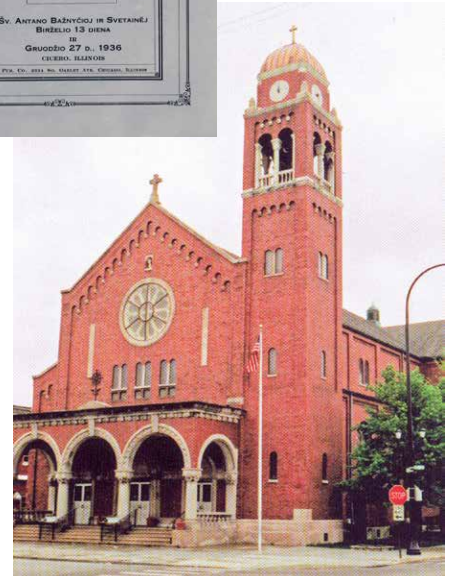
PARISH Pride

St. Anthony Church

1510 S. 49th Court, Cicero

There is a trinitarian life here that gives a multi-cultural character. Masses, confessions, devotions, the bulletin and social get-togethers involve at least three languages: Spanish, Lithuanian and English. Dedicated in 1926, this imposing Byzantine-style brick structure was designed by Leo Sreelka, with a portico added in 1954. Under a glorious mural, stained glass windows from Austria form a semi-circle around the chancel. Now a predominantly Hispanic parish, it still holds relics of Bishop George Matulaitis, who dedicated the church on a visit from Lithuania. His cause for sainthood is under consideration. Holy Week is a spiritual highpoint, when Mexican neighbors display their fervor in an outdoor Way of the Cross through the streets. When the bells in the tower peal, one is drawn to St. Anthony's. Not many doctors or lawyers here, just hard-working people greeting each other and praying on their knees.

Pastor: Father James J. Kastigar
Masses: Sundays 8 a.m. English; 9 a.m. Lithuanian; 10:15, 11:45 a.m.; 1:15, 2:45 and 7 p.m. Spanish
Seating capacity: 700 **Phone:** (708) 652-0231
Parish founded: 1911 **Photo by:** Sandy Bertog



Šv. Petro ir Povilo - Sts Peter and Paul

12259 Emerald, Chicago, IL
12433 S. Halsted, Chicago, IL
Organized: 1913

CHURCH LOCATION 1914-1959. From December 6, 1914 through mid-1959, the religious services of SS. Peter & Paul (Lithuanian) RC parish were conducted in the parish church which was located at 12255 South Emerald Avenue in the West Pullman neighborhood of Chicago. Excerpt from parish 75th anniversary book: "Archbishop James E. Quigley dedicated the combination church-school building of SS. Peter and Paul, which had been completed at 12255 South Emerald Avenue, Father Lukosius celebrated Mass in the new edifice for the first time on December 6, 1914."

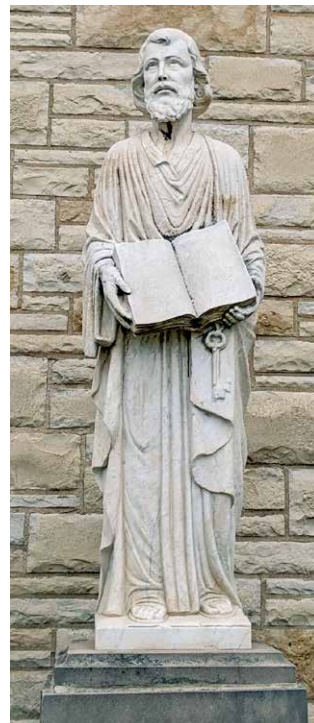
CHURCH LOCATION 1959-PRESENT. A new parish church on the northeast corner of 125th Street and South Halsted Street was dedicated on May 31, 1959, and was used thereafter for the parish religious services.

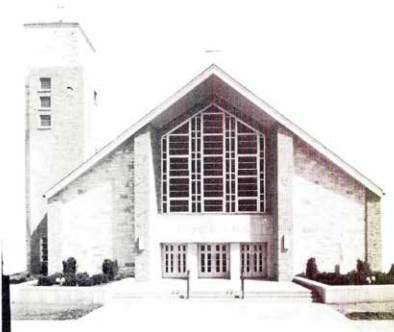
RECTORY LOCATION 1914-1959 (1960?). The rectory was located at 12259 South Emerald Avenue. (The rectory was located at the northeast corner of 123rd Street and S. Emerald Avenue, and the church was adjacent to the north side of the rectory.) The parish 75th anniversary book says that Father Lukosius "resided in the frame rectory which had been built at 12259 South Emerald Avenue."

LOCATION OF 1914 PARISH RELIGIOUS SERVICES PRIOR TO PARISH CHURCH. Before the SS. Peter & Paul (Lithuanian) RC parish church was first used for services on December 6, 1914, the parish services were held at Assumption BVM (Polish) RC church located on the corner of 123rd Street and S. Parnell Avenue. Excerpts from parish 50th anniversary book: "The Rev. Norbert Lukosius was appointed the first pastor of SS. Peter and Paul and came to work with the organizers



in late 1913. He made arrangements with the pastor of the Assumption B.V.M. parish, which was made up of Polish-speaking people, to have SS. Peter and Paul held its services there until the church was erected. The pastor consented. As a result, the Lithuanians began worshipping as parishioners of SS. Peter and Paul on February 15, 1914. They were able to use the church after the Polish services on Sunday mornings. ... The church in which they worshipped was located on the corner of 123rd



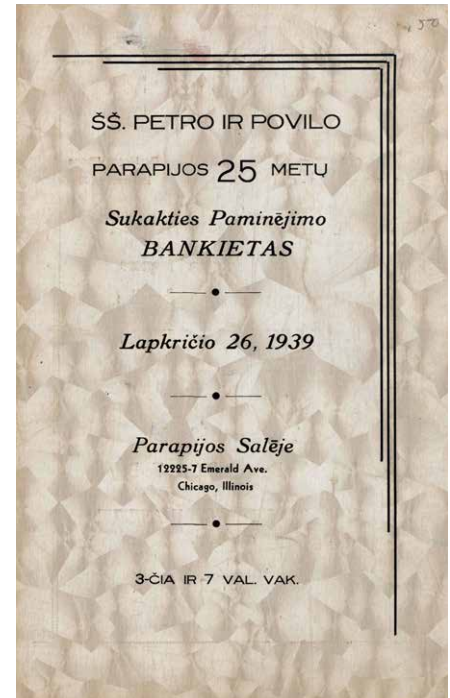


Our new church at 125th and South Halsted Street dedicated on May 31, 1959.

Our original church and school building at 123rd and Emerald Avenue, dedicated on October 28, 1914.

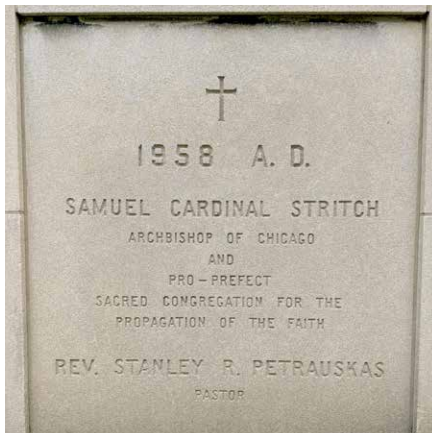


DIDYSIS ALTORIUS — MAIN ALTAR



MOKYKLA — SCHOOL - 12225-7 South Emerald Avenue
Parapijos mokykloje mokosi šimtas mokinių. Keturius Sv. Kazimiero vienuolijos seserys mokytojas. Mokykla valdoma atredita.

and Parnell. ... Although the church was blessed and dedicated, it was not put into use until December 6, 1914, when a few of the furnishings were installed so that Mass could be said. The last service held at Assumption was on Sunday, November 30th."



“Child’s Gate to Learning” Reaches 25th Year Milestone

Ramunė Kubilius

In 2023, the organization “Child’s Gate to Learning” (“Vaiko vartai į mokslą”) marked its twenty-fifth anniversary. The Chicago-based organization, with support groups in Cleveland, Detroit, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C. (earlier also in Sunny Hills, FL) can look back on its history to date and feel that it has achieved some milestones in helping Lithuania’s at-risk children. In 2023, „Child’s Gate to Learning“ maintained ties with and provided financial support for eight after-school centers in Lithuania that work with children and youths from at-risk families in Vilnius, Kaunas, Kazlų Rūda, Rumbonys, Šateikiai, Užpaliai Varėna, Žemaičių Kalvarija.

The early years

A saying, with roots in an African proverb, reminds us: „It takes a village to raise a child.“ In the United States, a concern for Lithuania’s children that grew into the organization „Child’s Gate to Learning“ started in the fall of 1997. In a session of the X Lithuanian Symposium of Arts and Sciences held in Chicago, the problem of young Lithuanian children who did not regularly attend school was presented by participants from Lithuania. At the time, Lithuania’s social services infrastructure was still in development and truancy was not yet addressed by government agencies as a problem. There were children, at that time called “street children,” who were living in home situations that were less than optimal. Economic problems and life with a parent or parents with alcoholism or substance abuse issues often created scenarios in which

older siblings were absent from school in order to take care of younger siblings or were forced by their parents to beg in the streets.

The group in Chicago, educators, and social workers by profession, spent several months after the symposium exploring ideas of what they could do to help. Their experience told them that attending school was essential for Lithuania’s younger generation, and that, particularly, included the young people about whom they heard at the symposium, who were slipping through the cracks. The volunteer group considered various strategies, including writing petition letters to Lithuanian government officials. Eventually, in 1998, it was decided to follow the path of direct support for after-school centers that were already slowly forming and operating in Lithuania, whose purpose was to work with these youths and their families. It was determined the most effective path was to help trustworthy centers already working in this area, providing them with moral, material, and financial support. In those early days, as the fields of social work and educational psychology were evolving in Lithuania, the Chicago group learned about a center in Vilnius that had started working with children from at-risk families (then called “street children”). The center provided



Logo, created by Liucė Siliūnas, 2022



Former volunteers, now grown, and 2023 fundraiser event volunteers

a place for the youths and children to come to after school, do homework under supervision, and receive a meal. This was the first center in Lithuania supported by the newly forming group that evolved into the not-for-profit organization, “Child’s Gate to Learning.” The “Vilties angelas” (Angel of Hope) center had been operating on a shoestring budget for just a few years by the time contact was established with “Child’s Gate to Learning”. It will celebrate its 30th anniversary in 2024. In those early years, as the group formalized and began fundraising, financial support for school supplies, food, and other essentials for the children often was the primary focus, though initially, some craft and school supplies and sometimes even clothing items were also sent from the United States. It was decided that financial support was paramount since financing was not always secure for the center in Vilnius and others that “Child’s Gate to Learning” came to support. There were years when local government financing was not dispersed for the first months of the new year, so “Child’s Gate to Learning” financial support helped pay utility bills during cold winter months...The organization’s annual financial support provided the centers with a measure of security so they could continue to operate (and keep their doors open).

In the next few years, as the organization went through an evolution from a support group to an organization, a few earlier founders spent months in Lithuania, volunteering at the center in Vilnius and visiting others who were added to the list of supported centers. Some



“Vilties Angelas” consulting a map during an excursion in Vilnius

centers were operating in “Caritas” buildings, some in Catholic parishes or community centers, and one in a school. Each had a different origin, but all were established to help children and youth referred to them (often by schools), providing a safe haven, support often not available at home, and one-on-one counseling, as warranted.

Activities and projects

Early on, “Child’s Gate to Learning” believed that in addition to homework help and meals, character-building programs featuring thematic discussions and games could add a valuable element to the programming offered by the centers. Those types of programs were not widely available in Lithuania at the time. A committee was formed of educators and other specialists who incorporated their



A visit to Varniai Regional Park near Šateikiai



"Vilties vėrinėliai" learning skills in the kitchen in Žemaičių Kalvarija

month or more at the centers, becoming involved in their routines, activities, and excursions. They were primarily students or high school upperclassmen, some were adults. This provided opportunities for both groups to become acquainted- young Lithuanians had "American friends", (temporary) big brothers and sisters to emulate. The Lithuanian Americans learned about and experienced everyday Lithuanian life, also learning about everyday realities for youths and children who didn't always have the supportive family environments they had. Some volunteers later stayed in touch with their centers and visited them. Many have said that volunteering in Lithuania was a meaningful life experience.

experience in the United States, with their knowledge of the Lithuanian language and culture. Five character-building programs were written, the first with a second edition. They emphasized life skills and values not always being learned at home, to build resiliency into adulthood. Positive values that were emphasized included friendship, community, generosity, and responsibility. There was a focus also on the prevention of dangerous and unhealthy habits- smoking and drinking, and life-affirming themes (suicide prevention measures). "Child's Gate to Learning" officers traveled to Lithuania to demonstrate the lesson plans and activities and familiarize centers staffs with their implementation. Some programs are still in active use since they can be offered to incoming groups of children.

From 2000-2019, "Child's Gate to Learning" provided training and referral of 110 U.S.-based volunteers who went to Lithuania to work at the supported centers. Some larger groups were accompanied by "Child's Gate to Learning" coordinating representatives. Most young volunteers spent a summer

Beginning in 2002, every few years, "Child's Gate to Learning" organized seminars in Kaunas for centers' representative staff and volunteers. The professional education weekends provided opportunities for them to hear invited expert speakers, and participate in small discussion group discussions and exercises. They networked with each other, sharing experiences about the successes and realities of their work with at-risk families'



Seminar in Kaunas, 2017



Supported centers' 25th-anniversary congratulations

children. The Covid pandemic canceled 2020 plans for an in-person seminar, first planned to take place in Vilnius. Instead, a virtual seminar in two parts was organized (in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021), and educational materials and books were sent to round out the project.

Throughout the years, “Child’s Gate to Learning” officers have maintained contact with center directors and a coordinator in Lithuania who helped with local logistics and communications, as needed. Some were even able to visit the United States. Throughout the years, various organizations have provided general and project-based financial support. This included the Lithuanian Foundation, Kazickas Family Foundation, Raskauskas Family Foundation, California Community Foundation, Daughters of Lithuania, the Knights of Lithuania, the Florida Lithuanian Open Golf Tournament, and many individual and family supporters. Other groups have provided volunteer time at fundraiser events, bussing tables, and performing in musical or dance programs. Special project funding made it possible for “Child’s Gate to Learning” to sponsor the special seminars and offer centers the opportunity to plan excursions that families of center children and youths might not be able to afford if done through their schools for a fee. Excursion themes have allowed centers to organize explorations of Lithuania’s natural beauty (its wildlife and fauna

in regional and national parks), delve into Lithuania’s history (its great manors, historic cities, and towns), and other varied themes through the years.

A few traditions, such as an annual fall fundraising luncheon in Lemont, Illinois, developed over the years. “Child’s Gate to Learning” has set up information booths and sold donated Lithuanian items and baked goods at various fairs and festivals. Members and supporters were invited to annual update sessions to inform them about the organization’s and its supported centers’ activities and finances. A special fundraiser has been held. In April 2023, “Child’s Gate to Learning” commemorated its 25th anniversary in Lemont, Illinois, inviting organization founders and former volunteers to a celebratory picnic. Over the years, support group coordinators in other cities have organized luncheons, participated in Lithuanian-American fairs in their communities, and conducted fundraising by mail.

Looking back and moving forward

How can success be measured in the work of a non-profit volunteer organization such as “Child’s Gate to Learning”? Some accolades have been received in the form of certificates, letters of appreciation, and special awards. In 2010, the Knights of Lithuania, Midwest



"Child's Gate to Learning" officers and directors, 2019

Chapter, honored „Child’s Gate to Learning“ with its „Award of Distinction“ in recognition of the work done for Lithuania and its children. In 2018, the organization received an award in Lithuania, „Už jaunimo ugdymą atsakingam požiūriui į gyvybę“, that honored its life-affirming work with children and youths. Although gratifying, awards are not a true measure of success, though they are a recognition by others.

Perhaps someday, organizations such as “Child’s Gate to Learning” will be the subject of an academic study. However, on the part of the organization itself, presentations by officers have allowed them to share highlights about the organization’s work with a Rotary Group in Illinois, a conference on migration in Vilnius, and a Lithuanian Symposium of Arts and Sciences in Chicago (years after the one which provided the impetus to found the organization). To “Child’s Gate to Learning”, stories also relay smaller and larger successes. Some stories have been visual, such as the slide shows featuring photographs during annual meetings. Young filmmaker and former volunteer, Mantas Motekaitis, created two brief films that provided views into everyday center activities to help supporters envision them. Other stories are those conveyed by centers’ directors or heard by officers or board members during visits to supported centers in Lithuania.

Some former center attendees, now grown and with families, continue to stay in touch, and some have become center volunteers. There has been a gratifying rise in local volunteerism in Lithuania, and the supported centers have training programs to prepare them. A number of the centers participate in an accreditation program developed by the Lithuanian government. Although the application and qualification process is not easy, when achieved, a level of annual guaranteed governmental financial support is ensured. The professionalism of centers’ staff increasingly ensures that trained social workers, educational psychologists, and activities directors are available on-site to plan the centers’ programming and provide psychological and other support. Many of the centers have also developed separate programs for parents and invite parents and their children to holiday celebrations and excursions.

Who can forget the years of the Covid pandemic? Many traditional activities were put on hold. In the United States, event planning was at a standstill. Some meetings were held virtually, and fundraising took place by mail. E-mails from centers’ staff informed “Child’s Gate to Learning” officers about how they were maintaining contact with their centers’ families, virtually or by phone, providing homework support, having food packages for the families ready for pick up

or even delivering themselves. Though the Lithuanian Foundation allotted project funding deadlines could not be adjusted, “Child’s Gate to Learning” planned seminars and outings in Lithuania were delayed for at least a year to meet the deadlines. Some imagination was needed to convert the seminars into virtual events and postpone excursions until it was safe to conduct them. Eventually, the centers were able to re-open, and activities resumed, some adapted or different from how they were prior to the pandemic era.

What does the future hold for “Child’s Gate to Learning” and its continued goal of supporting Lithuania’s children? That remains to be seen. Of course, “Child’s Gate to Learning” is not the only Lithuanian-American initiative that supports Lithuania’s families and children. Still, over the years, the organization has experienced generosity and confidence from individual supporters and funding organizations and has nurtured close ties with the centers it has supported in Lithuania. It should

also be acknowledged that progress has been made in the past 25 years in the social work infrastructure in Lithuania, though the ‘good fight’ is still going on at after-school centers since the incidence of at-risk families with children growing up in troubled home environments has not been erased. The centers showed resilience in surviving the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic years. In the years since the war broke out in Ukraine, they have welcomed young Ukrainian children into centers, especially in the smaller communities where there weren’t separate centers that could accommodate the young refugees. Dedicated persons who care for children in Lithuania continue their work and provide a haven, a safe place for young school children that helps them grow into responsible and productive adults. Over the years, centers in Lithuania have expressed gratitude for the helping hands from across the Atlantic that have provided moral and financial support. Such has been the “village” (mentioned earlier) that has continued to work together to raise children.



Former volunteers, now grown, and 2023 fundraiser event volunteers

Lithuanians at the Holiday Folk Fair International

Palmira Janušonienė-Westholm

The Holiday Folk Fair International (the HFFI), America's premier multicultural festival, is produced by the International Institute of Wisconsin, a non-profit social service organization based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, dedicated to racial, cultural, and ethnic understanding and assisting the resettlement of refugees in Wisconsin. For the past 80 years, the festival has been held for three days on the weekend before Thanksgiving in various sites in Milwaukee County and, for the past 25 years, at the Exposition Center at Wisconsin State Fair Park in West Allis, Wisconsin.

The festival was conceived to promote a sense of unity and inclusion while celebrating cultural differences in language, customs, traditions, heritage, values, and beliefs of the many nationalities that represent the cultural diversity of the immigrants who have settled in and become citizens of the USA.

Dr. Paul Trebian, President and CEO of the International Institute of Wisconsin, stated that diversity is our strength. The Holiday Folk Fair International continues to build bridges among diverse cultural communities, groups, and people. It has been the keeper of our rich and diverse heritage found in this country, safeguarding the past, honoring the present, and embracing the future. It provides an opportunity for cultures from all over the world to showcase their traditions, dress,



heritage, languages, food, and dance that are unique and meaningful to them, that call them together, and that celebrate their stories and prevent individuals from assimilating into a dominant culture and losing their sense of living heritage in the process.

Realizing the importance of introducing and sharing these concepts with younger generations, the HFFI, after several years, named Friday the first day of the annual festival as Education Day when schools were invited to bring busloads of elementary school, middle school, and high school students from southeast Wisconsin and northeast Illinois to visit the festival giving them "passports" to collect in them "stamps" from each cultural exhibit in Heritage Lane with a common word in different languages and interact with volunteers dressed in traditional dress in each exhibit learning something about each culture represented, watching demonstrations of various crafts and traditions as well as learning words of greeting. The students are also able to sample a great variety of ethnic foods at the World Cafe, shop at International Bazaar marketplace booths, and view colorfully dressed dancers in traditional dress perform their national dances in several venues throughout the festival location,



The HFFI has high standards for Cultural exhibits. All volunteers must be in traditional dress and actively engage the general public. There may not be any food or beverages inside exhibits; they must be “manned” at all times and express the annual theme while showcasing authentic crafts, traditions, arts, and language. Members of the newly organized Lithuanian American Community chapters in Milwaukee, Kenosha, and Racine, Wisconsin, began to participate in Holiday Folk Fair International in the mid-1950s, the Milwaukee chapter with its first cultural exhibit, followed in a year or two by the folk dance ensemble Bijūnas led by founding artistic director Stasys Milašius of Kenosha with student dancers from Kenosha and Racine and women’s groups from same communities selling traditional foods and gifts. Lithuanians were participating in all four main areas of the HFFI. In 1976 Vytautas Janušonis, Chairman of the Milwaukee chapter of LAC, became a member of the International Institute of Wisconsin representing Lithuanians. For the Bicentennial year, he agreed to take charge of the Lithuanian Cultural Exhibit and was the first among the HFFI cultural exhibits to design and build a “cottage” as an exhibit base. Over the years, many other ethnic groups followed suit. He continued as general chairman of Lithuanians, participating in the



HFFI until 2003.

In the early 1970s, Lithuanian Dance Ensemble Klumpė made up of adult dancers of Lithuanian heritage and their spouses and friends from southeastern Wisconsin and northeastern Illinois, some members of the Waukegan/Lake County LAC chapter, also under the direction of Stasys Milašius, founded at the urging of Gediminas and Sigita Damašius and Vilija and Rimantas Sužiedėlis, began to perform in entertainment venues of the HFFI assisted by the Spindulys Dance ensemble under the direction of Rasa Šoliūnaitė-Paskočimas from Lemont. Klumpė dancers and volunteer friends under the capable leadership of

Sigita Damašius and Vilija Sužiedėlis took over the Marketplace booth, turning it into a successful venture, eventually importing popular candle houses from the newly independent Lithuania and also selling the popular straw Christmas tree ornaments as well as other gift items. Both Stasys Milašius and Vytautas Janušonis were asked to join the organizing committee of the HFFI. They were eventually elected to the International Institute of Wisconsin Wall of Honor for exceptional and long service to the HFFI.



In the mid-1980s, Lithuanians were honored to be chosen as that year’s HFFI featured/showcased ethnic group and hosted the Gintaras dance

ensemble from Toronto, Canada. Regina Narušis was chairman of the Lithuanian organizing committee for that year. A new cultural exhibit cottage was built.

According to Alex Durtka, President and CEO at that time, it was an extremely successful HFFI that year. Under the leadership of Vytautas Janušonis during the week of the HFFI and Thanksgiving weekend, Lithuanian cultural exhibits decorated various sites throughout the city of Milwaukee, in various government buildings and one major downtown store window and a high-rise building lobby displayed a Lithuanian photographer's exhibit. After the HFFI, the cultural exhibit cottage was on display in the Milwaukee Public Museum.

After Stasys and Giedrė Milašius, who led Klumpė for 20-plus years, moved to California in the late 1990s, Ingrida Spokas became Klumpė's artistic director. During the 30 years of Lithuanian active participation, the Cultural Exhibit received several awards and commendations in various categories of presentation

of culture. Klumpė was asked in the late 1990s, a week before the HFFI was to open, to fill in with another ethnic HFFI dance ensemble for a guest Balkan dance ensemble who, due to document problems, were unable to travel and perform at the HFFI in a long guest program.

In 2004, after Vytautas Janušonis's death, Klumpė continued for two years to perform and present a Cultural exhibit. However, as lives changed and members moved on to other states for work opportunities, university studies, or had to withdraw for other reasons, at the end of 2006, Klumpė left the HFFI, performed at the Los Angeles Folk Dance Festival in 2008, and then with regret disbanded. Lemont's Spindulys continued to perform for two more of the HFFI festivals but were also unable to continue at the HFFI. Within several

years, a new and younger dance ensemble Laumė, led by founding artistic director Vaida Indriliūnas, started to perform at various entertainment venues and represent Lithuanians at the HFFI until the present time.

In 2018, under the leadership of Waukegan/Lake County Executive Committee's hardworking chairman Gintas Steponavičius, and his energetic family, the third version of the cottage exhibit was reclaimed and refurbished by members of the committee, and the decision was made to return to participate in the HFFI. The Cultural Exhibit was successful due to the assistance of volunteers, some members of the LAC W/LC chapter, some staff members



of the Milwaukee Lithuanian Cultural School, and some members of the Žaibas dance ensemble based in Madison as well as northeast IL Laumė dance ensemble and a visiting guest from Lithuania. After receiving a great deal of positive response from the public, a decision was made to return to the HFFI in 2019 for another, as it turned out, successful run with the

assistance of the same group of volunteers. Sadly, in 2020 and 2021, the Lithuanians had to participate in Virtual the HFFI with video, traditional dress interviews, video dance performances, and videos of Lithuanian favorite food demonstrations. A surprise in 2021 was the Wall of Honor award received by Palmira Janušonis-Westholm for many years of participation in the HFFI in various capacities.

We regretted not being able to muster the troops for the HFFI 2022. After much deliberation, a decision was made to return to the actual life and color the HFFI in 2023 for its 80th Jubilee. After three decades of allowing Cultural Exhibits to decide the theme of their exhibit presentation, in the early 1990s, the HFFI organizing committee decided to have the cultural exhibits all do their interpretation of a given theme, which was announced in early September.

The theme announced at the early October Participant chairperson meeting for the HFFI 2023, was Celebrate the Culture of Traditional Dress. The Lithuanian cultural exhibit consisted of our cottage front porch decorated with textiles, straw ornamental art, floral arrangements, and wood carvings and the outside of the cottage with photo posters of couples dressed in ethnographic regional traditional dresses hung on the assigned space drapes, mannequins dressed in traditional dress, one standing near the porch entrance as well as two standing on another side of garden enclosure, and finally, a collection of ceramic and wood carved dolls dressed in traditional dress in various poses of dancing and play displayed on a table in the back of the garden enclosure while the front table displayed several albums of the traditional regional dress. The Lithuanian participants at the cultural exhibit were delighted Sunday afternoon to receive The Best Depiction of Culture Award among several categories of awards given to a number of cultural exhibits.

Of course, one of the favorite depictions of one's heritage for both participants as well as audience observers is folk dance. This year the Lithuanian contingent of dancers was quite large and traveled significant distances to



perform in the two main entertainment venues of the HFFI All Nations Theater and Tanzhaus and delighted their audiences with multiple performances. Two children's dance groups - Amber from northeast Illinois and Vëtra from the Minneapolis area - performed. Three adult groups that performed were Laumė from northeast Illinois, Pūga from the Minneapolis area, and Rusnė from the southwest suburban area of Chicago. A 20-performer women's dance group that performs traditional folk dances and choreographed versions of ancient Baltic dances also participated. We heard a lot of appreciative applause during and after all of their performances.



The Lithuanian American Community Waukegan/Lake County Chapter of the HFFI committee wants to express their sincere thank you to all participants/volunteers who gave a great deal of time, effort, and devotion to so beautifully represent our Lithuanian culture to an appreciative general public interested in learning about various cultures and nationalities. We also wish to express our deep appreciation to the Lithuanian Foundation for its financial support, which enabled us to celebrate and showcase our nationality, culture, traditions, and arts to a large audience at a widely celebrated and emulated international festival.

Lithuanians at the World Festival of Nations in 2023

Gintautas Steponavičius, Waukegan/Lake County Chapter board member

On November 17-19, 2023, the 80th anniversary Festival of Nations was held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Every year, representatives of different nations living in the United States come together. Their main goal is to acquaint the visitors of the festival with the imprints of their culture. What distinguishes it from other similar festivals held in the U.S. is that those who participate in the festival represent not their country, but their own people's culture.

For many years, Lithuanians were represented at this festival by the Wisconsin Lithuanian community. Its representative, who actively participated in the event, Vytautas Janušonis, was even elected to the Festival's Wall of Honor. As time passed and the number of active Wisconsin Lithuanians decreased, increasingly more participants from the Northern Illinois Chapter of the Waukegan/Lake County Lithuanian community joined to help them. Now, for more than a decade, the main presenters of Lithuanian culture at this Festival of Nations became the Waukegan/Lake County Chapter.

The annual Milwaukee Festival, which takes place the weekend before Thanksgiving, has a few features. One of them is that the organizers of the festival pay special attention to the younger generation and dedicate the first day of the festival to them. On this day, many Milwaukee schools bring their students to the event to acquaint the children with other cultures. On Friday, the festival is bustling with students who show great interest and want to learn as much as possible about different cultures. Another feature of the festival is that its organizers indicate the theme. Based on their selection, the participants present their people's culture to the attendees. The theme is usually disclosed in early September. Thus, this does not leave much time for any preparation. In the last few years, the themes were traditional dishes, language and its intricacies, the attitude of a nation toward other nationalities, and tolerance in society. This year, the theme was traditional dress.



As in every year of participation in the festival, the Lithuanian representatives tried to introduce the proposed topic to the visitors as much as possible. There were national costume mannequins, albums, posters, and even a porch of a Lithuanian house. National clothing was presented in detail, according to all ethnographic regions of Lithuania. Those attending the event and talking about their national costumes also wore them. It was gratifying to see that this year there were an extraordinary number of volunteers who contributed to the organization and presentation of the exposition. We would like to give special thanks for all the efforts to Palmira Janušonienė-Westholm, who has been added to the Wall of Honour in 2021.

One of the ways to present the culture of a nation is through a dance. Interestingly, this year Lithuanians were represented by a large group of dancers - Pūga from Minnesota, Laumė, and a women's group, Rusnė. The audience applauded the performances of the children's dance group Vėtra from Minnesota and Amber Dance. The pagan-themed dances by the Rusnė dance group were viewed with great interest; they performed the dances named "Vėtrungės" and "Gervės."



A special festival organizing committee awards a prize for the best, most beautiful, and richest cultural presentation. We, the Lithuanians of the Waukegan-Lake County area, are extremely happy that this award, "Best Depiction of Culture", has been given to the Lithuanian nation in 2023. A sincere and big thank you to all those who have contributed to the honorable representation of the Lithuanian nation in what is probably the largest festival of the culture of the peoples of the USA. Special thanks to the Lithuanian Foundation for its financial support.



Colorado families go behind the scenes of the Denver Nuggets basketball team

Edita Buzėnienė, Principal of the Colorado Lithuanian School

On December 9, 2023, the Lithuanian School of Colorado invited Colorado families to visit the Denver Nuggets basketball team. It was the last event of the "I am Like a Lithuanian Champion" sports event series organized by the Colorado Lithuanian School and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania.

We gathered at the Denver Ball Arena and enthusiastically explored behind the scenes of the Denver Nuggets basketball team.

Have you ever been in the locker room of one of the best basketball teams in the USA? Have you measured the size of your shoe against the shoes of the basketball players in that room? Or did you test the softness of the chair where one of the best basketball players in the world, Nikola Jokic, sits after a game? Have you seen the diner where the players get their sustenance? Or have you seen up close the gym where basketball "muscles" are grown? Haven't you? Or have you been in this basketball gym? No?! Have you shot three-pointers together with Tomas Balčėtis, whose name has been getting louder and



Ball Arena



School principal with Tomas Balčėtis

louder every year in the US basketball world since 2013, when the young Lithuanian retired from professional basketball due to health problems and started working as a statistical analyst for the Denver Nuggets? Ten years later, Tomas Balčėtis is now the second man in the club - the Assistant General Manager.

Lithuanian children from all over Colorado were invited to this unconventional event and they were not disappointed. Those 2 hours flew by in a minute. Everyone tested the strength and roundness of the ball. The children posed hundreds of questions to the cheerful, enthusiastic, and very friendly Tomys Balčėcis, who welcomed us and took over the role of the excursion leader. And do you think that 2 hours was enough for us? Oh, far from it! Next time we will meet Tomas and his family at the Lithuanian school in Colorado!

The Colorado families attending the event took away



In the Denver Nuggets locker room

good emotions and new knowledge about the players' daily routines during training. A sense of community was present throughout the event. The aim of this project was to help Lithuanian children living in Colorado to learn more about famous Lithuanian athletes. We hope that this knowledge will increase the children's pride in their

Lithuanian origin and encourage them to take an interest in the future activities of Lithuanian athletes.

We would like to thank the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania for their support in the implementation of this wonderful project.



Denver Nuggets logos collection



Denver Nuggets



Antanas is aiming for a three-point



The ball is very round



Gabija is coached by her father



Elenutė is a fan



Lauras is trying out Jamal Murray's chair



One way for basketball and the Lithuanian language



Elena, Cecilija and Emilija are the youngest fans



Denver Nuggets training court



Thank you, Tomas, for a fantastic event



A picture to remember Denver Nuggets, 2023

Lithuanian Heritage in the United States of America – How to Preserve it?

On November 22, 2023, The Lithuanian Heritage Commission organized a discussion about the Lithuanian Heritage in the US and the ways to preserve it. The discussion was held at the Martynas Mažvydas Lithuanian National Library and funded by the Lithuanian Council for Culture as a follow-up of the project entitled "The Lithuanian School of Interwar Modernism and the Signs of its Continuity on the World Map (Updating of the U-PAVELDAS database with new narratives and dissemination of the data)". As part of this project, the upaveldas.lt map of Lithuania's significant heritage abroad was updated with new objects in the USA. Participants of the discussion included Prof. Vytautas Juozapaitis, Chairman of the Culture Committee of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania; Gabrielė Žaidytė, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Cultural Issues; Rimantas Mikaitis, Vice-Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania; Gitana Grigaitytė, Ambassador-at-large for Communication and Cultural Diplomacy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania; Dr. Vaidutė Ščiglienė, Heritage Commission chairwoman; architectural historian Dr. Vaidas Petrulis, member of the Heritage Commission; remotely - Arvydas Urbonavičius, the Lithuanian American Community President; architect Danius Glinskis; and art historian Viktorija Kašubaitė-Matranga. The discussion was moderated by heritage protection specialist Rugilė Balkaitė-Puodžiūnienė.

Lithuanian-American cultural heritage has been discussed by the Lithuanian American Community, the World Lithuanian Community, and the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. A special commission has been functioning and cultural objects were being registered, but it has not gone any further than that. The participants of this discussion showed their determination to continue the work that has been started and to get down to the actual preservation of cultural monuments. Danius Glinskis, an architect who spoke virtually from New York, presented the list of Lithuanian cultural monuments previously compiled by the LAC, which he had been tasked with completing, and which was also signed by Augustinas Žemaitis, a traveler, blogger, and documenter of Lithuanian heritage in the world, and Arvydas Reneckis, a filmmaker. According to Mr. Glinskis, the list of Lithuanian-American cultural objects has been forwarded to the responsible state organizations in Lithuania; now we seek Lithuania to formally apply to the USA for the preservation of

these objects. However, Mr. Mikaitis, Lithuanian Vice-Minister of Culture, who attended the discussion at the Mažvydas Library, stated that he had "suspended" the list.

As the situation was not explained, one can only speculate that the reason for this suspension was that the Lithuanian state institutions have drawn up their own list (whether it is coordinated with the list previously drawn up by the LAM also remains unclear), and an agreement has already been signed on the protection of cultural monuments between Lithuania and the United States of America (on October 15, 2002). It seems that Lithuania is late in doing its homework.

The desire to push the process of preserving Lithuanian heritage forward as quickly as possible is understandable. In her presentation, Dr. Ščiglienė used the phrase: "We work separately from one another". She informed that there is also a list of cultural monuments compiled by the Lithuanian Heritage Commission. It is perhaps this "working separately" hindered the development of the process of preserving cultural monuments abroad. The governments of the Lithuanian American Community and the Republic of Lithuania change all the time and not all the work started by previous governments is continued. Let us hope that this time it will be different, that the new group of Lithuanian cultural heritage enthusiasts will not let this important issue languish, and that the representative



Guilded armor of Jurgis Radvila I (father of Barbora Radvilaitė) made in Augsburg. Kept in the Modern Art Museum in New York, New York. Source: <https://vkpk.lt/u-zemelapis/kuriniai-niujorko-metropolitano-meno-muziejuje/>

of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Grigaitytė's dream that a strategy for Lithuanian cultural heritage abroad will finally be developed, will come true. And it would be high time, because every day the treasures are being destroyed by time and by people - children throwing away the documents collected by their parents and grandparents, which are important for Lithuanian heritage, other owners buying up properties with Lithuanian heritage, and demolishing them, etc. Such cases as the case of survival of the stained glass windows created by Ada Sutkuvienė for the Lithuanian Bank in Chicago are rare. The Bank was closed, and the stained glass windows were bought by the family of the artist Vanda and Gediminas Balukas, a Lithuanian American activist. They used the art in their house and later donated it to the Lithuanian Youth Center café, where it still remains. It should be added that stained glass windows and sacred treasures of some Lithuanian churches have been handed over to churches in Lithuania, and a large part of the creative legacy of famous artists, such as Adomas Varnas, Antanas Galdikas, Pranas Domšaitis, Mykolas Žilinskas, Kazys Varnelis, Vytautas Kasiulis, and other, is kept in the museums of Lithuania.

"We have never been another Lithuania," said Arvydas Urbonavičius, the Lithuanian American Community President, welcoming the participants of the discussion. He reminded everyone that a year ago a new cultural heritage group was established by the LAC together with Lithuania.

The discussion on the Lithuanian Heritage in the US and its preservation is a continuation of the project on Kaunas Modernism, which was started earlier. Almost the entire community of pre-war architects, who created the now world-famous Art Deco style in Kaunas (Kaunas interwar architecture has been inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List), had moved to the West, mainly to the United States, so it was interesting to see what



Monument to Tadas Kosciuszka in Florida, 350 2nd Ave N St. Petersburg, FL.
Source: <https://vkpk.lt/u-zemelapis/paminklas-tadui-kosciuskai-floridoje/>

happened to the Kaunas Art Deco later, and in order to research this issue, Dr. Vaidas Petrulis was sent to the US for six months. Dr. Petrulis introduced Lithuanian architecture in the US.

The initiator of the meeting, Dr. Ščiglienė, announced that next year there will be an exhibition dedicated to artists who left Lithuania. There is Lithuanian cultural heritage abroad in 35 countries. Since 2018, IT specialist Julius Markevičius has been maintaining a database of

this heritage, and a visualization of the summarized material was shown during the discussion. It was mentioned that the Commission is also in contact with private enthusiasts who care about Lithuanian heritage abroad, e.g. Augustinas Žemaitis.

Dr. Petrulis raised the question, should all Lithuanian heritage abroad be considered Lithuanian? Are the works of Lithuanian architects who have studied abroad after leaving Lithuania and whose work is not influenced by the Lithuanian heritage to be considered Lithuanian heritage? By the way, the only representative of Kaunas Art Deco in America was architect Matas Žaldokas, who designed the administration building of the Lithuanian National Cemetery in Chicago. He also counted the monument to Darius and Girėnas, also in Chicago, among the Art Deco works. The architectural expert also presented other prominent buildings designed by Lithuanian architects of the post-war refugee generation, describing their work as a legacy of the

Cold War, with a very strong political message to the world - we are Lithuanians! The name of Lithuania was meant to be shown in many different ways. Lithuanian symbols were used in the architecture and inspiration was sought from folk art.

Art historian V. Kašubaitė-Matranga provided interesting insights into Lithuanian cultural heritage and artists. She also offered guidelines for a cultural heritage strategy. She said that at the end of the Second World War, 21 teachers and students of the Kaunas Art School, the main forge for artists before the war, left Lithuania for the United States. They brought with them not only intellectual but also financial capital. Next year, the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture will open an exhibition on Lithuanian artists in Chicago, which she is curating. She gave details of the birth of specific objects in America. Among other things, she welcomed the fact that there are many interesting art exhibitions in Lithuania but pointed out that the English of the accompanying catalogs is poor. The diaspora could make a good contribution here to give foreigners an image of cultured Lithuania. In general, there is a lack of good sources about Lithuania in English. This gap needs to be filled.

The world's Lithuanian cultural heritage must be digitized and put in the cloud for everyone to see.

In her closing speech, Dr. Ščigienė talked about the fate of the memorial plaque to Alexander Carolus Curtius, the first Lithuanian to travel to the New Continent in the 17th century. Curtius, who practiced as a doctor, is considered to be the head of the first gymnasium in New York. The place where the school headed by Curtius in the 17th century used to stand now is a stock exchange building, and a plaque was put on its wall by Lithuanian Americans in 2000. When the building was renovated, the plaque was removed, and now its fate is unknown. The Heritage Commissioner questioned whether Lithuania is capable of preserving what is Lithuanian in the world. The representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Grigaitytė also mentioned the 170-year-old Rennhof Castle in Germany, where the Vasario 16th Gymnasium has been operating for 70 years. It needs repairs, which would cost several hundred thousand euros.

"Let's not stop talking about it," said Vytautas Juozapaitis, chairman of the Seimas Culture Committee, summing up the discussion.

A full recording of the discussion (in Lithuanian) will soon be available on the National Martynas Mažvydas Library website.

Prepared using the article by Audronė Škiudaitė published in the Draugas newspaper.



Roslyn Lithuanian Cemetery in Roslyn, Washington. Source: <https://vkpk.lt/u-zemelapis/roslino-lietuviu-kapines/>

Security

A 2,200-man military exercise, Strong Griffin 2023, saw 700 US soldiers from the 3rd Battalion 67th Armored Regiment as an attacking opposing force to a combined Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, and Norwegian defending force with anti-tank “laser tag” missiles at the Lithuanian Pabrade Training Area, just northeast of Vilnius. The mechanized attackers got bogged down in the mud and snow and slid off the unpaved roads in the heavily forested area.

Since 2017 NATO has maintained multi-national, battalion-sized battlegroups in the Baltics, led by Germany in Lithuania, Canada in Latvia, and the United Kingdom in Estonia and has reinforced them since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Lithuania has signed a bilateral Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA) with the US Department of Defense. This non-binding agreement facilitates the procurement of essential industrial resources. Lithuania joins 15 SOSA partners, such as Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom in this defense cooperation initiative.

The Lithuanian State Border Guard Service contracted for the purchase of three five-bladed H145 helicopters from Airbus Helicopters. The helicopters will be used for border patrol, search and rescue, disaster relief, medevac, firefighting, transport of donor organs, and deployment of Lithuanian Special Forces. The new purchase will add to the existing eight H145s in service. New features include a five-bladed rotor, which increases the useful load by 150 kilograms and a bearingless main rotor design, which eases maintenance requirements.

The Foreign Ministry presented a note of protest to Belarus over threatening statements by Pavel Muraveiko, First Deputy State Secretary of the Security Council of Belarus, which were published in *Vechny Minsk*. He stated that Lithuania’s restrictions on the cross-border movement of goods constituted economic aggression that could be fought with arms.

Investigative journalists Dovydas Pancerovas and Birute Davidonyte’s book, “The Whistleblower and the President” is the source of claims that a former State Security Department officer was directed to check then-candidate Gitanas Nausėda’s election team and possible supporters during the 2019 Presidential election. The Seimas will investigate pos-

sible unlawful collection of personal information, possible unlawful interference in the election process, and possible violations of the whistleblower’s rights.

The citizens of Siauliai will participate in a 4-month poll to decide on moving the remains of WWII Soviet Soldiers from the grounds of the Cathedral of the Apostles Peter and Paul to a cemetery managed by the Siauliai City Council. If more than 10% favor the move, the Council will implement the decision. Russia is hyper-sensitive to any perceived dishonor to its WWII dead.

Ukraine

Lithuanian PM Ingrida Šimonytė and Ukrainian PM Denys Shmyhal met and signed an agreement on technical and financial cooperation as well as the plan to establish a special tribunal to convict those responsible for the current war and crimes against Ukraine. In laying a wreath at the Wall of Remembrance of the Fallen for Ukraine, PM Šimonytė said, “They gave their lives to defend us.” She noted that the European Union family is incomplete without Ukraine.

On the last Saturday in November, Ukraine commemorates the Holodomor, when nearly 4 million Ukrainians were purposely starved to death in 1932-33 during a man-made famine to force farm collectivization and export food to generate revenue for the USSR. On the night before the commemoration, Russia launched 75 Iranian Skakhed drones against Kyiv. Most were shot down but some got through and injured five people. US Ambassador to Ukraine, Bridget Brink said in her video message at the commemoration, “Russia’s war with its gravest imaginable crimes isn’t the first attempt to erase Ukrainian nation from the face of the Earth.”

Jarek Niewierowicz, Chief Advisor to President Nausėda, indicated that Lithuania has supplied Ukraine with items to support the energy supply, including 274 transformers and components, 1,000 generators, a mobile thermal boiler house, and two high-capacity electrical autotransformers.

The Lithuanian Foreign Ministry announced that Lithuania supplied Ukraine with 3 million rounds of 7.62X51 mm ammunition, remote detonation systems, and winter equipment. The 2024 budget includes 340 million euros for Ukraine. The total value of military assistance to Ukraine is already near 500 million euros.

current events

The Speaker of the Seimas, Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen, met with Pope Francis at the Vatican to discuss relations between Lithuania and the Holy See, the role of the Catholic Church, and aid to Ukrainian war refugees. She said that “recently, Pope Francis transferred 100,000 euros to Caritas Lithuania for the needs of refugees”. Caritas Lithuania has 110 workers and 3,000 volunteers.

The Lithuanian Defense Ministry reports that the Lithuanian military is now repairing German-made Leopard tanks that were damaged on Ukraine’s front lines. Lithuania has been repairing German-provided PzH2000 Howitzers and has trained the first group of 18 Ukrainian mechanics to repair the howitzers.

Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis called on the EU to speed up its promise to deliver a million artillery shells to Ukraine in its fight against Russia. Bloomberg, the news organization, reports that only 300,000 shells have been delivered. North Korea is reported to have delivered 350,000 shells to Russia.

The NGO, Blue/Yellow, has the goal of raising 10 million euros for Ukraine by allowing supporters of Ukraine to “own” a personal virtual digital Ukrainian soldier, who can be deployed at the sponsor’s direction. The raised funds will be used to purchase optics, drones, night vision devices, vehicles, and supplies for the “Digital UA Soldier”.

The U.S. State Department approved the sale of 36 Raytheon AIM-120C-8 Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles for \$100 million which are used with the National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System. Lithuania plans on transferring the systems to Ukraine.

Covid-19

On one day in November, Lithuania recorded 78 new cases and no deaths. There were 113 patients in hospitals, including 6 in the ICU. The 14-day primary infection rate reached 173.2 per 100,000 people with a 7-day percentage of positive tests at 33.4%.

In early October, Lithuania had a daily report of 229 new Covid-19 cases and no deaths. The 14-day primary infection rate moved down to 125.4 cases per 100,000 people and the 7-day percentage of positive tests was 22%. Almost 1.19 million people of the population of 2.8 million (42.5%) have tested positive at least once.

Business

Under challenge by Lithuania at the World Trade Organization, China has dropped its blockage of goods from Lithuania in response to Taiwan opening a trade office in Vilnius. However, China and Lithuania have not resumed normal diplomatic relations. The Voice of America reports that trade between Taiwan and Lithuania grew 50% from 2021 to 2022.

Danish Nordic Solar will build a large solar park 60 km north of Vilnius in Molėtai. It will consist of 150,000 solar panels and have a capacity of 100 MWp which could power 28,000 households. The solar panels are mounted on a patented steel structure that minimizes shade and increases efficiency. The park is expected to be operating in the first half of 2024. Nordic Solar has solar parks in 9 European countries with a combined peak potential production capacity of about 390 MWp.



In 2021, there were 3,347 fatal workplace accidents across the EU. On a per 100,000 person rate, Latvia was worse (4.25) and Lithuania a close second (4.0). In contrast, Germany had 1.0 fatalities per 100,000 workers against an average of 1.75 for the EU 2.75 for Estonia, and about 1.75 for Poland. Many of the accidents occurred in construction. Notable were 6 workers who died of cardiac arrest in France in September 2021 while harvesting grapes in the Rhone and Champagne regions where the temperature reached 35C. The French energy group Veolia and its associates Vilniaus Energija and Litesko lost its appeal of a July 2023 ruling that it owed Lithuania 240 million euros for damages caused by unlawfully obtaining lease contracts for heating businesses in ten municipalities between 1999 and 2003.

Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis officially opened Lithuania's Embassy to Singapore in late October 2023. According to the Foreign Ministry, bilateral trade between Lithuania and Singapore amounted to 223.5 million euros last year. The Nausėda Administration has already opened Embassies in Australia and South Korea and permitted a controversial trade office from Taiwan.

Kormotech, a producer of wet and dry food for cats and dogs, is expanding its facilities in the Kėdainiai Free Economic Zone where its automated plant produces an annual 20,000 tons of product. It will invest 60 million euros over the next five years and add 200 specialists. Headquartered in Lviv, Ukraine, it employs more than 1,200 worldwide. Its Save Pets of Ukraine program has delivered 1,500 tons of food for over 300,000 dogs and cats plus provided generators, heaters, and vaccines to shelters.

Mouser Electronics, a Berkshire Hathaway company and global distributor of semiconductors and electronic components, is opening a European Customer Service Center in Vilnius, which will support customers in the Baltics and Finland. The company offers 6.8 million products from over 1,200 manufacturers to over 650,000 customers in 223 countries and territories. Recent sales were \$4 billion with 3,900 employees (an impressive \$1 million/employee). Vilnius joins 26 support locations distributing products from its million-square-foot distribution facility in Dallas, Texas, where it employs 138 Vertical Lift Modules, the largest installation in North America.

The VAT Gap is an estimate of the overall difference between the expected Value Added Tax (VAT) and the amount actually collected. In 2021, Lithuania did not collect an estimated 795 million euros or 14.5%. This was better than the 18.7% for 2020. The median VAT Gap for EU member countries is 4.9%. In comparison, Estonia did not collect 40 million euros (1.4%) and Latvia 225 million euros (7.3%). Poland did not collect 1,694 million euros (3.3%); Germany 7,460 million euros (2.8%); Romania 8,976 million euros (36.7%) and Italy 14,600 million euros (10.8%). In total, the EU did not collect 60,603 million euros (5.4%). The Gap exists because of fraud, evasion, bankruptcies, and imperfect tax administration. Compliance has gotten better because of the digitalization of the tax system, real-time reporting of transactions, and e-invoicing. Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, some government support measures were often contingent on paying taxes, which stimulated compliance.

Johnson Matthey, a British multinational leader in metals and chemicals, plans to establish a Global

Business Services (GBS) center in Vilnius, with the hiring of 200 employees over the next 3 years. The office will serve as a hub for finance, IT, HR, and procurement. It has a presence in 30 countries, with 12,600 employees, and has been in existence for 205 years. Its 2022 revenue was over 16 billion pounds. It has strong capabilities in catalytic converters and fuel cells and supplied fuel cells used on the Apollo space missions.

Foreign Minister Landsbergis opened Lithuania's new embassy in Singapore as part of an initiative within the Indo-Pacific region. According to the Foreign Ministry, bilateral trade between Lithuania and Singapore amounted to 223.5 million euros. Lithuania recently opened embassies in Australia and South Korea and established a trade representative office in Taiwan.

General

Lithuanian Armed Forces Day, November 24, commemorates the restoration of the country's armed forces in 1918 after the end of World War I. In Vilnius, 1,400 people marched along with 100 pieces of military equipment, including US Army Abrams tanks and M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles, and five knights with chainmail, plate armor, spears, small axes, and large swords. The knights carried a bright red tabard bearing the Columns of Gediminas, a historic Lithuanian coat of arms and emblem for the armed forces.



The US Senate has approved the Biden administration's nomination of Kara McDonald as Ambassador to Lithuania. The career diplomat served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human

current events

Rights, and Labor. She also served as the Senior Official to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism for the Office of the Special Envoy. She previously served as US Consul General in Strasbourg (site of the European Parliament) and Deputy Permanent Observer to the Council of Europe. She has served in US Embassies in Port-au-Prince and Bucharest. She earned a BA in French and Comparative Literature from the University of Michigan and an MA from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, Medford, MA. She speaks French, Romanian and Russian. She will replace Robert Gilchrist, who has served in Lithuania since 2019.

May 12, 2024, is the date set for the Presidential Election and a referendum on the legalization of multiple citizenship.

The Presidents of Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania participated in the 28th Session of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Dubai (COP28) but they boycotted the joint photo session because Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko participated in it. President Nausėda said, "It would be hypocritical to stand shoulder to shoulder with the head of state who became the platform of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and discuss the future of the world and climate change as if nothing had happened". He added, "This is called a family photo. Lukashenko is not part of the family we all want to be in".

Prime Minister Šimonytė has been named the Presidential Candidate of the ruling conservative Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party.

Chief of Defense General Rupšys, who owns property in the Ignalina District, admitted a mistake in renting a Vilnius apartment from his son and using the 445 euro/month military housing allowance available to any Lithuanian soldier who does not own real estate in the area of service.

Kęstutis Jucevičius, a former Director of Lithuania's Financial Crime Investigation Service, FCIS (2012-2017), pleaded guilty of influence peddling. In November 2022, he demanded and received a 2,000 euro bribe with the promise to influence FCIS officials to change a person's procedural status in suspected VAT fraud.

After a short strike of 3,000 teachers, the Lithuanian Ministry of Education signed a 4-year agreement with 4 labor unions, which provides for a 30% pay increase in 2024 and a 21% increase next year with further pay increases up to 2028 to be drawn up by May 2024. The collective agreement has protective measures against arbitrary dismissal but allows for the dismissal of teachers who fail to meet required standards.



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2024

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05

MĖNUO

12

DIENA

UŽ
LR PILIETYBĖS
IŠSAUGOJIMĄ

On May 12, 2024, a referendum on the legalization of multiple citizenship will be held in Lithuania. The draft Constitutional Law on Citizenship, which elaborates on the principles of citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania and the grounds for acquiring and losing it, is available here: <https://e-Seimas.lrs.lt/.../3a2ea860d44d11ed9b3c9397e1236c2a>. The World Lithuanian Community is preparing a plan for engaging the diaspora and disseminating the referendum to it. Meetings are also planned with the Chief Elections Committee (CEC) and other institutions to improve the automation and dissemination of voting registration processes. If you have ideas and/or would like to contribute, please contact plb@plb.lt.

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