

# bridges



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**Front Cover:** Chicago Lithuanian Saturday School Graduating Class 2020 students came to thank their teacher Simona Norgėlaitė and awarded her "The Best Teacher in School" title. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine, students did not have the opportunity to participate in graduation ceremony in school. Pictured from left, Domas Rašymas, Nojus Juzėnas, Laura Aleksonytė, Simona Masalskytė, Benas Mongirdas, Dominik Kundrotas and teacher, Simona Norgėlaitė. Missing from picture are Benediktas Bieliauskas and Vidmantas Revuckas. Photo by Loreta Masalskienė.

**Back Cover:** This year, students of Genys Lithuanian School in San Francisco finished their school year online.

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## from the editor

Dear readers,

This year, the month of May was different for all of us. And of course, for some of us it was more different than for others. Traditionally, it is the month of graduations. So many elementary and high school students as well as college and university graduates usually participate in their graduation ceremonies and have parties afterward. This year, graduates had it different. They were robbed of their ceremonies and parties by the sly disease caused by the COVID-19 virus. My heart goes out to all those students. On the cover of this month's issue of Bridges, you see some of these students. They are graduates of the Chicago Lithuanian Saturday School. All in masks but still coming together to thank their beloved teacher. I wonder if they have that sense of graduating, that sense of completion. It must be hard for them. It must be hard for many of us. However, even though we are all in the same storm, we are not in the same boat. Some of us might have not been touched by the virus as much as others. For some, it seems that this is some sort of "conspiracy," that it is not real, that nothing serious is going on or, at least, it is not so serious that we should stay at home and try to isolate ourselves from the world. For others, especially those who had family members succumb to this illness, it has been as real as it can get. I don't remember the country ever being so divided as it seems to be now. And yet, at the same time, it has never been so equal for everyone. Because if you think, in the face of this virus, we are all equal. All of us. No matter who or where we are. On the entire planet. The virus does not distinguish between races, nationalities, social status, age, or gender. We all can get sick, and none of us knows what the outcome would be if we do. It is strange and very trying time in history. And yet, history has been repeating itself over and over again. Just think of a century-old 1918 Spanish flu pandemic. And our means of defending ourselves against plagues of all sorts seem to be the same since the times of Giovanni Boccaccio's Decameron.

I wish you all good health. Stay safe.

Karilė Vaitkutė  
Editor



# Children of War

Stories of Lithuanian Immigrants to the United States



Julijonas Kumpikevičius and Izabelė Avižienytė before they were married in Lithuania, c 1936-1937.

Giedre Kumpikas has resided in New York ever since she was nine years old. She is an accomplished, multi-faceted professional – French professor, filmmaker, radio show host, and a prominent community leader. At the same time, she is representative of a generation that could be called the Children of War. Born in Lithuania, having spent her early childhood years in post-war displaced persons' camps in Germany, she immigrated to the United States where she never broke ties with the Lithuanian immigrant community. Was being “good Lithuanians” for these children of war directly proportional to the pain of their parents' loss of their motherland? As Giedre herself said, she was “the bright and shining future” for her parents. Giedre kindly agreed to reminisce about her parents' immigrant life and reflect on what it means to be a Lithuanian immigrant.

**Karilė Vaitkutė:** I believe every immigrant, regardless of nationality, reflects on the question of their identity. What does it mean and how does it feel to live in a country that is not your birth country. How do you feel about being Lithuanian in America?

**Giedrė Kumpikas:** Anytime there is a fusion of two cultures, it becomes complicated emotionally, socially, and frequently even morally. Having experienced World War II as a child, the sound of bombs to a child is unforgettable. The whistling, the whirring, which seems to be just over your head, leaves an imprint that lasts a lifetime. Even now, I react to a noon siren when it is sounded as a test signal in various localities. One says that war is the ultimate experience, and so, I can attest that it is. There is only one goal during a war - and that is to survive. Even as a child, I understood that.

America seemed like an impossible dream to a child of war-torn Europe. I truly believed that the sidewalks in America were paved with gold - such was the picture presented - in America, everything was possible, known as the American Dream. The reality was quite different. The streets were not paved with gold and the Dream required very hard work.

To be Lithuanian in America - I retained my national identity quite strongly in my youth because that was my circle. We were all DPs, all children of war. We clung to each other for security, for a sense of belonging, for a sense of worth. We lived by our parents' standards and codes of behavior, even by their former political and social affiliations. We loved the Lithuania which our parents had taken away with them in their hearts and minds. It became a focal point, almost a sacred rite - to maintain our language, our culture, and our identity.

As time went on, as our people integrated into the workforce, although

most were not able to recreate their position, but became simple laborers, and we, young people, earned college degrees, the assimilation became less restrictive. However, the communities formed in various cities were very strong. Almost all had Saturday schools, folk dance groups, youth camps. We went to Saturday night dances. Most marriages were within the communities. The question of maintaining our identity became less relevant. Young people began to break away little by little, but the bond was still strong.

On the other hand, although most became American citizens, we did not feel that we were “real” Americans. The question asked was always - “Where were you born? When did you come here?” The very nuanced social separation was felt. Our names were not Anglo-Saxon, not Smith or Jones, not even German or Italian, or Irish. We were still the First Generation.

In response to the original question, after my long introduction, at this point in my life, having spent most of it in New York, I can say that I am fully assimilated, professionally, and socially. However, my friendships are still mostly European. Perhaps it is the American soil that creates a different sort of mentality, but I sometimes feel a very slight difference in my thought process, but, perhaps it is because of my profession, my very deep immersion in the French language and literature, combined with my five years of childhood in Germany, and, of course, my native Lithuanian culture. I have three or four perspectives which complicate, or, rather, enrich my thinking.

**KV:** Do you have any reminiscences of Lithuania from your early childhood years?

**GK:** I was still a small child, but I have some childish recollections, not of Lithuania as a country, but little



Pilot Julijonas Kumpikevičius before his flight from Prague to Kaunas on March 5, 1934. He was 23 years old at the time.

vignettes of life: my grandmother telling me to be careful of bees; my father warning me not to put my little finger in the car’s cigarette lighter (of course, I did not listen to him); my father swimming across the swift and powerful Nemunas River, his head disappearing under the water and my mother’s terror; the feeling of discomfort after getting my smallpox vaccination and the two painful red scabs on my little arm; being thrown into the air by one of my father’s friends (I remember my fright as I felt myself flying. Perhaps that is the reason that I am now, and have always been, afraid of heights): the taste of my first ice cream cone - the most delicious sensation that I had ever experienced and which I am still trying to recapture; my very kind uncle carrying me up the hill because my small legs could not take me any further; not being able to reach the door handle of my parents’ bedroom,

and so many more dear parts of my brief childhood in my native country.

**KV:** The Second World War disrupted the lives of so many, if not everybody. Those who fled to the West, found themselves in DP (displaced persons) camps, mostly in Germany. Eventually, many found their new home in the United States. What is the story of your family’s immigration to the US?

At first, South America, principally Colombia, was issuing visas. My father was inclined to accept, but my mother was hesitant, due to the country’s elevation, because she had a heart condition. Then, Australia extended visas, and, once again, my father was inclined to accept, but, my mother, ever cautious, heard that the crossing was extremely arduous due to the heat and she also thought that Australia was so very far away.

So we waited. Finally, after five years, the United States offered visas



Julijonas and Izabelė Kumpikevičius in Germany in 1947.



Giedrė with her friends in Germany, 1947.

if people could find a sponsor. The word was broadcast and many good-willing people came forth and signed affidavits of support. My family was sponsored by my aunt and uncle, who had left Europe in 1947 because my uncle was a diplomat.

When we arrived in the United States, to my disappointment, we docked in Boston, contrary to our original destination of New York. I had heard so much about the Statue of Liberty and I was looking forward to seeing it with great excitement.

Upon disembarking we were taken to the train station. We were given thirty dollars by U.N.R.R.A. (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), so my father bought us some oranges. That was my first taste of America. We took the train to New York where my uncle and my older cousin met us at Grand Central Station. My aunt and uncle rented us a small apartment in Williamsburg for \$10 for one week and told us that we would have to pay after that. My mother had brought in \$300, even though we were not allowed to do so, because, supposedly the sponsors had to take care of us. It was precious money, which she had saved from selling what little clothing and things they had before leaving for the United States.

**KV:** What was your parents' life like after they came to the US? How did they feel? What did they talk about? What their thoughts on the life they once had were?

**GK:** My sense of empathy for my parents was very strong. I saw them struggling to come to terms with the fact that there was no way back, that they had to do their best in a new country. They were not used to the summer heat of Brooklyn, with no air conditioning, a sparse kitchen with just an icebox in the tiny hallway to preserve our food; there was no bathtub, so my mother would wash me down every day in a basin in the kitchen, because she was so afraid of polio, or we would go to the Public Baths on Metropolitan Avenue; to escape the sweltering July heat, we would walk down at night to the East River for a breath of fresh air.

My father could not find a job because he did not speak English and he had no American experience. After their good life in Lithuania, they were thrown into the poor, immigrant life of Williamsburg. I could feel my parents' depression, but also their bravery.

It improved somewhat once my father got a job as a pressor, which he found too exhausting, then as a machinist, which he kept for thirty-five years. Life was hard; money was always lacking. My mother worked in various factories, even though she had a university degree and was a French teacher by profession. She finally obtained a position as an artist coloring photographs.

Throughout their struggles, they frequently mentioned Lithuania, how their life had been. My father had an important position in Lithuania, where he was the Director of Transportation in Vilnius. They had a beautiful apartment, a housekeeper, a chauffeur, and family and friends. I could see that their life had become, if not a tragedy, but a life of regret. I was their bright and shining future. When they came to America, their life changed dramatically. Our first apartment was small, I had to sleep on a couch in the tiny living room; the second apartment, nine months later, was quite nice and had a bathtub. We lived there for ten years until the neighborhood changed; my mother scrimped and saved and we were finally able to save enough money for a down payment on a house in Queens.

And so life went on. We stayed in that house, then upgraded to another house in a better neighborhood. My father kept working until just before he turned sixty-five. One day, he said to my mother that he could no longer do it. He had sustained an injury on the job and he was worn out. My mother told him to quit. My mother also stopped working once we moved to our new home, so I picked up the mortgage payments. If I had not remained living at home, my parents could not have stayed in their new home. But, I had a steady job as a high school teacher, and I loved my parents. I wanted, in some way, to ease their life and compensate for what they had lost.



Coming to the United States of America aboard the *USS General S. D. Sturgis* in 1949.

**KV:** You arrived in the United States when you were just a month shy of your ninth birthday. You grew up in this country. You received your education in this country. Your career as a French literature professor seems to have nothing to do with Lithuania. However, you never broke ties with the Lithuanian way of life and stayed close to the Lithuanian community. Why is that?

**GK:** It was the circle with which I was familiar. I had many friends. My parents always wanted me to be true to my roots. I respected them and I suppose that I had good organizational skills and for that reason, I was invited to take various posts in our organizations. I belonged in this community, and I found it rewarding working with my own people, especially in the early years, before 1990 when Lithuania declared its independence. There



**LITTLE DP TELLS OF FIRST CHRISTMAS IN U. S.**—New Brooklyn resident, Lithuanian-born Gedre Kumpikas, tells radio audience her delight at spending Christmas in this country. Interviewing her over Station WNBC is Ken Johnston, Eagle newscaster. Gedre is holding gift Santa sent her via the Eagle. Eagle Staff photo

Nine-year old Giedrė gives interview for the WNBC radio station.



Giedrė with her parents, Izabelė and Julijonas, after the PhD award ceremony in 1974.

was a constant battle to make the world aware of the Soviet occupation and the loss of our homeland. At this point in time, it is more of a cultural mission, rather than a freedom issue. I belonged briefly to the Scouts, but later joined the Neo-Lithuanians, which was an academic student organization to which my mother had also belonged. I held various posts there - secretary, treasurer, president. We had student-type caps of green velvet with gold embroidery. We attended summer camps in various states - Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York.

We were very nice, decent young people.

In 2001, I was asked to be the Chairman of the Lithuanian American Community (New York District). I stayed in that position until 2004. During that time, I ran six music concerts with great success.

In 2004, I was approached by the Lithuanian National Foundation to be its President. It was an excellent non-profit organization concerned with supporting Lithuania culturally and educationally. In 2008, the Chairman of the Board having stepped down, I was elected to be Chairman of the Board. I stayed in that position for four years, then stayed on for two more years on the Board.

I also reorganized the Lithuanian Citizens' Club, originally situated in Maspeth with its own building, but that building having been fraudulently taken over, I organized a lawsuit against the fraud perpetrators. We were not successful in repossessing the building, which had already been sold and then leased to New York City. It was an unfortunate loss, but we did receive a certain compensation. At present, I am its president. I am also the vice president of the Knights of Lithuania, Council 110, in Maspeth. The membership has been declining steadily. The newcomers who came after Independence in 1990, do not have the same

commitment and interest in organizations as did the former two waves of immigrants - the pre-World War I and the post World War II. The First Wave especially was very patriotic. They built churches, citizens' clubs and formed local organizations. The Second Wave, the DP's, maintained much of what had been established by the previous group and formed their own groups as well. I am still nominally involved in the Knights of Lithuania, although the pillar of the organization is the President, Dr. Paul Michael Kazas.

**KV:** As if all of the above-mentioned involvement would not be enough, you are also an award-winning filmmaker. Tell us about your documentary film "Wings to Remember."

My film is the story of my father's flight from Prague to Kaunas in 1934. It was the incipient stage of aviation. There was great enthusiasm after Lindberg's transatlantic flight and many young men wanted to learn to fly. I had heard my father's account of his historic flight repeatedly, which had been a sensation in Lithuania. He was the first foreign pilot to have received his pilot's license in Prague and had also purchased his own plane. That had been the high point of my father's youth. He had accomplished his dream and had reached esteem professionally and socially. And then, everything came crashing down with the invasion and occupation of Lithuania by the Soviets. I believe my father suffered greatly having lost his position and status which he was never able to recreate. As the years went by, he would recount the story of his flight, when he was young when no challenge was too great. I grew up with that story and when my father died in 1985, I thought I might write a book about it to honor him and in some way, to immortalize his achievement, but then, some years later, a filmmaker suggested I make a film.

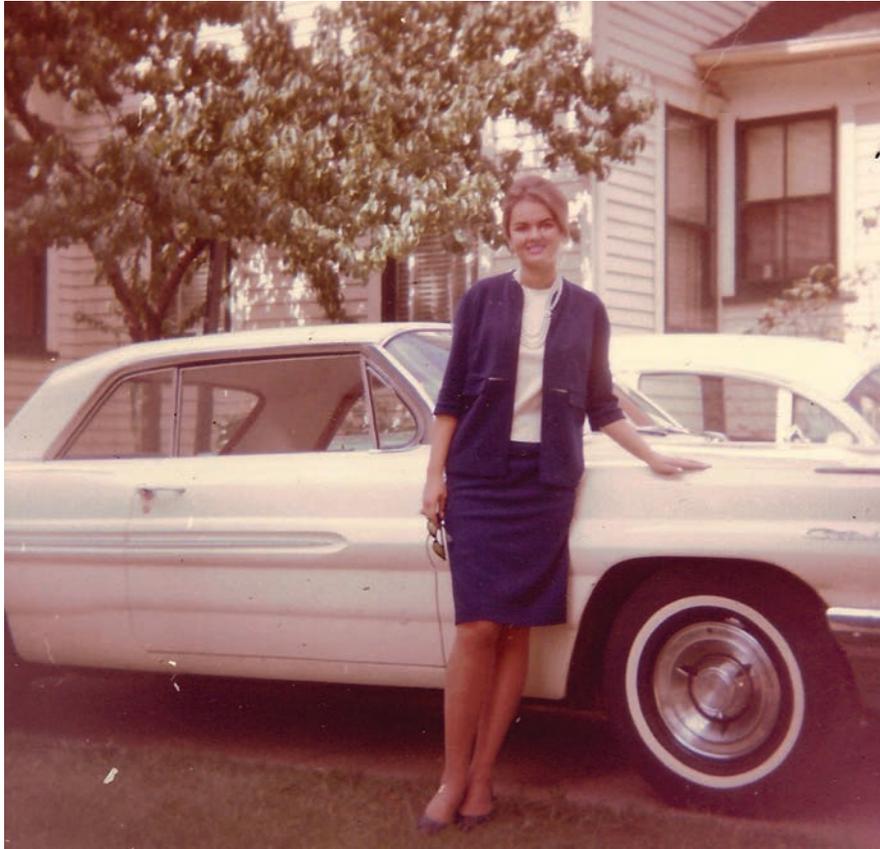


Giedrė's second dog, a Cocker Spaniel Taffy, 1961.

At first, I thought it would be an impossible task - I knew nothing about making a film, but being brave and adventurous, I decided to try. All I needed was a camera and some professionals to help me. I wrote the script in two days, and since I had my father's hand-written account of his flight, it made it much easier. I also had his album which contained photographs of his flight preparation and landing. I gathered archival material from various sources - the Vilnius archives; photographs from friends as well as from my own private collection; I wrote to Germany, to the Czech Republic for more archival material; everyone I contacted was very helpful, somehow, aviation still had a magic ring to it - a brave young man flying in an open bi-plane during hazardous weather and political conditions was an appealing adventure. I bought a camera and my

friend's husband, a very well-known Hollywood cameraman, agreed to film the American segments of the second half of the film. My movie friends also gave me a contact in the Czech Republic to recreate the flight. I flew there; we organized the cameramen, the sound man, two pilots, and two antique planes. It was quite an endeavor because we only had one day to film, everything had to fall into place, especially the weather. Finally, on July 10, 2007, we succeeded in filming the major portion of the flight sequence. It was one of the happiest days of my life. After that, I had to fly to Lithuania, to repeat another flying sequence. Once again, organize everyone - pilots, cameraman, sound man. We succeeded there as well, due to excellent professionals and the very helpful Aero Club.

Once all the physical preparation had been done, the search for an edi-



Giedrė's first car, Pontiac Catalina, 1962.

tor began. That turned out to be quite important. I had a very good Lithuanian editor who did substantial work, but then I was fortunate in finding a creative editor in the U.S. That work took several months and was the most expensive. I learned that everything that one writes in a script has to be visually presented; I learned that music and sound are two different things; I learned that subtitles had to be just right. Each step took hours, if not days.

I can honestly say that the making of a film, is a daunting process. It is very complicated. I believe I could make another documentary without as much effort now since I went through an intense learning process.

**KV:** You are also a Lithuanian radio show host and producer. What inspires you? What is the content of the show? Who is your audience?

**GK:** I took over the radio program on May 27, 2001, when the previous host suddenly quit. We bought the equipment within one week, contracted a new sponsorship with the station, and went on the air. As of this writing, we are reaching 980 shows. The program consists of an editorial, local Lithuanian news, music, interviews with visiting diplomats, artists, writers, musicians and anyone we feel would be interesting to our audience. We do not have an accurate knowledge of the number of listeners, but presumably, they are mostly people in the New York area. Although there are also some who tune in to our show in Lithuania. However, we do stream live every Tuesday at 9 p.m. on [www.wpat930am.com](http://www.wpat930am.com). What inspires me? I suppose it is the desire to maintain contact with the Lithuanian community, to provide a public service for our older listeners who do not use the Internet. Besides, radio is

an old medium and it is interesting.

**KV:** Let's imagine there had never been any Lithuanian immigration to the United States. Would Lithuania be different today? Did Lithuanian Americans help Lithuania in any way?

**GK:** I believe that Lithuania would be a major actor story in Europe. In spite of the subjugation by the Russians, Lithuania, between the two wars, had made great progress economically. In the short span of twenty years, it had begun exporting dairy and meat products to England and other European countries. Banks had been established, there was an opera with world-class singers who also performed at La Scala in Milan. And they won the European Basketball Championship in 1937. Lithuania was essentially a rural society and the immigrants before the First World War were economic immigrants. Their loss was felt but not as strongly as the loss of immigrants during the Second World War, immigrants who were mostly educated and prosperous. I need to mention also the tragedy of the hundreds of thousands who were deported by the Soviets to the gulags of Siberia. This loss of thousands of people impoverished the country, sapped its intellectual strength, and left it vulnerable to repopulation by Russians.

The immigrants of the early 19th century assisted Lithuania economically. Many who came here and earned money through very hard work, such as in the coal mines of Pennsylvania, in the stockyards of Chicago, sent money back to Lithuania to help other family members and some, who returned, established businesses. The future seemed very bright for an Independent Lithuania. The DP generation in America supported relatives who found themselves behind the Iron Curtain and in Siberia by sending packages of clothing, fabrics, and whatever they were

allowed to do. Of course, this was after the death of Stalin in 1953 when restrictions eased somewhat.

Politically, Lithuania had a consulate in New York, its diplomats established ties in the American government and made it aware of Lithuania's rising importance. During the occupation, principally between 1944 and the 1960s, American Lithuanians organized Independence Day marches in Manhattan, protests in front of the Russian Consulate, wrote letters to Congressmen and Senators to call attention to the plight of Lithuanians behind the Iron Curtain.

Culturally, we kept alive the traditions in Saturday schools, commemorated all-important historical dates and anniversaries, formed sports clubs, principally soccer and basketball, promoted concerts, mostly classical music and opera singers. Chicago even formed its own opera company, formed youth organizations. In short, our parents did everything to maintain a cultural and spiritual bond with Lithuania.

**KV:** You have traveled to Lithuania many times. How did the country change in the past thirty or forty years?

**GK:** The first time I went to Lithuania was in 1978. It was my first contact with the Soviet system. I was first struck by the grayness of the buildings. The Soviet-built architecture of public housing was depressing to look at - they were blocks of concrete, all uniform, all shabby-looking. It was as if time had stood still. The interiors had concrete cement steps, iron bars for handrails. The apartments were small but strangely enough, the furniture was large by contrast. The predominant color was brown - brown carpets, brown couches, beige-brown wallpaper. Outside it was gray; inside it was brown. There seemed to be no other colors. I heard that whatever Moscow approved, that is what



Giedrė Kumpikas holding Platinum Remi Award for the "Wings to Remember" documentary, Houston, Texas, 2009.

people could obtain. I went to one supermarket, if one may call it that, and I saw one sickly greenish-looking chicken on the shelf of the meat department, but lots of vodka.

There were very few cars. I filmed one little green car trudging down the road. It was strange to see. There were alcohol bars at eight in the morning, where men stopped by for a shot before going to work.

I went again in 1987. It was already

much better. There seemed to be more life both in the streets and cafes; there were hotel restaurants with a better selection of food.

I went again in 1991 after Perestroika and Glasnost when Lithuania was already independent and the change was becoming quite visible.

In the past 20-25 years, Lithuania is not recognizable from what it looked like before - many fine restaurants, hotels, perhaps too much glitz, and



Tautos Fondas in New York, 2009. From left: Evaldas Remeza, Giedrė Kumpikas, Ambassador Jonas Paslauskas, Algis Vedeckas, and Pranas Povilaitis.

huge traffic jams. I often think nostalgically of that forlorn little green car I saw on the road so many years ago.

**KV:** In Vilnius, you reside in the same apartment you and your parents used to live before the War. How did you accomplish that? Why was it important? What feelings, emotions, and thoughts does that evoke in you?

**GK:** My mother used to talk to me about that apartment, telling me how beautiful it was, how elegant, how they used to entertain people, important people like the Mayor of Vilnius, the famous tenor Kipras Petrauskas. So when I went to Vilnius the first time in 1978, I went to the building, it was a three-story apartment building with six apartments. I went up to the second floor and looked at the door of apartment number 3. I was going to knock on the door, but then I saw four Russian names listed. I realized that that beautiful apartment had been subdivided into four apartments. I was hesitant. I could hardly imagine what it must have looked like

inside. I gave up on my inclination to see it.

In 1987, I went back again. This time there was only one Russian name, so I rang the bell. A nice woman opened the door. She seemed quite friendly. I explained to her that I was from America, that my parents had lived there during the war, that I had been there as a small child. She was very gracious and let me in and even served some tea. I had some vague recollections of space, but I immediately recognized the door to the bedroom and the handle which I had not been able to reach. It was sweet.

Then, in 1991, I went back for the third time and went to the court side entrance. I saw a Lithuanian name and rang the bell. I told the nice older man who opened the door that I had lived there as a child and offered him to buy his side of the apartment for cash in dollars! He seemed taken aback and said he would have to speak to his son. Within the hour the son called and agreed. However, we had to do some negotiation because he wanted us to find him

another suitable apartment, which took some time, but with my cousin's help, we did and the deal was made. Then came the negotiation for the street side. The Russian businessman said that he knew I needed the apartment because I already had the courtside, so I had to pay him a higher price. Finally, I was the owner of the entire, subdivided apartment. Then began the reconstruction, but that is a very long story, quite interesting, with many comic elements, but perhaps it would be too long. Now, the apartment is in its former period of glory. A diplomat once came stopped in briefly, looked at it, then kissed my hand and said, "I thank you for myself, and for Lithuania that you recreated this beautiful apartment."

**KV:** It is amazing but it seems that you are not slowing down as far as Lithuania-related activities. What are your future plans?

**GK:** For the moment, I am looking for a publisher who would be interested in publishing my aunt's memoirs from Siberia. With my mother's help, I translated them from Lithuanian some years ago and also published them at my own expense, but I am interested in finding a publishing company, which might want to undertake this. It is a wonderful book, very clear, very easy to read, and very visual.

I always have plans, the only thing is time. Perhaps my mother's story - she was an excellent storyteller, and to continue to host the radio program, I hope to reach 1000 shows. I plan to continue being the Lithuanian Citizens' Club president, the vice president of the Knights of Lithuania, and to take part in Lithuanian events.

Ideas and plans always come up. I can never understand when people say that they are bored. How can anyone be bored? There is so much to do, so much beauty in the world, so many stories to tell.

# Lithuanian Research Center News

Dr. Indrė Antanaitis-Jacobs, LRC Director of Archives



LRC at the St. Casimir Fair (Kaziuko mugė); March 1st, World Lithuanian Center, Lemont. Photo by Dr. Robert Vitas.

After roughly fourteen months of disassembling and reassembling and transporting various shelving units, after the steady and careful transport of thousands of boxes of various Lithuanian cultural archival treasures, we can finally say that the largest part of the Lithuanian Research Center's physical move to our Lemont location is complete. The LRC in Lemont houses our Periodicals, Photographs, Musicology Department, and Archival Collections of various Lithuanian individuals and organizations. The LRC in Chicago continues to house our Library books, museums, and several large archive collections – the Fine Arts Archive, Jonas Dainauskas Archive, Dr. Audrius Plioplys Archive, and the Lithuanian American Community Archive.

Work at the Center has now changed tracks to in-place reorganization projects, both in our Chicago and our Lemont branches. Our Library books constitute the largest division of the LRC that remains in Chicago and our library has been undergoing major reorganization as we are cataloging, shifting, and integrating books that were housed in different rooms to fit our main third-floor library space.

In Lemont, the largest reorganization project is our Musicology Department. From pulling duplicates and restructuring catalogs of large groups like choruses to catching up on lists of the many LP and audiocassette donations of the past year and a half, this one department has been and continues to be especially busy.

The Lithuanian Research Center's Periodical digitization project continues. Currently, Dr. Jonas Daugirdas is overseeing the digitization of the LRC's entire set of the magazine "Lietuvių dienos (Lithuanian Days)" (1950-1991) as well as the 1950-1995 issues of "Darbininkas". Please see LRC link [spauda.org](http://spauda.org) to access the periodicals we have digitized from our archives.

Another ongoing activity of the Center is the sale of books via Amazon. The vast majority of the books we sell are those published by the Lithuanian Research and Studies Center. Of these, Dr. William Urban's books (The Prussian Crusade, The Samogitian Crusade, The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle, Tannenbergs and After) continue to be among the most popular sales. Overall, however, our most popular book sale for some time has been *Thought We'd Be Back Soon*, edited by Ansysas, Cidzikaitė,



The Rotary Club of Chicagoland Lithuanians presents Award of Excellence to Dr. Robert Vitas and monetary award to the Lithuanian Research and Studies Center; Feb. 21st, WLC, Lithuanian Museum of Art.

and Vanderstoep (and published by Aukso žuvys).

In addition to new books, we sold a fair amount of duplicate literature and music records at the St. Casimir Fair (Kaziuko mugė) at the World Lithuanian Center this March. Here the items most purchased were various novels translated into Lithuanian from other languages, as well as any and every kind of Lithuanian music record.

In Lemont, we are making progress with the slow process of requisite county inspections. In January, in addition to passing our final pre-opening fire inspection, we received official approval from the Cook County Health Department on our water and septic system. The next step is to receive our Special Use Permit, after that – undergo the building, electrical, plumbing, and heating/cooling inspections, at which point we can “hang up our sign.”



Kristina Lapienyte, LRC President, hard at work in the office; LRC, Chicago. Photo by Gailė Vitas.

Overseeing this seemingly endless process of inspection and permit legalities is LRC's Chairman of the Board Dr. Robert Vitas. At the same time, Dr. Vitas continues to present the Center's activities and our mission of cultural heritage preservation to the community. One such presentation this year was to the Sietuva Lithuanian Girl Scouts Senior Leaders at the World Lithuanian Center in Lemont (January 16th). Another presentation (February 9th), at Nativity of the Blessed Mary Church in Marquette Park in Chicago, was on the service of Lieutenant Samuel Harris, an American military officer who died fighting for Lithuania in 1920 during her Wars of Independence.

The Lithuanian Research Center continues to receive various Lithuanian archival donations. Many Lithuanian books and periodicals and music records have been donated in recent months, in addition to personal archives of some significant leaders in the Lithuanian American community such as the recent large donations of archival materials of Lithuanian Foundation founder and Lithuanian American Community leader Dr. Antanas Razma, musician and chorus director Kazys Steponavičius (a.k.a. Charles F. Stephens), and Catholic priest and activist Kęstutis Žemaitis.

We are so grateful not just for archival donations, but to all the many people who support our mission with monetary donations. Huge thanks as always to the Lithuanian Foundation who continues to be a major financial supporter of the Lithuanian Research Center. Kristina Lapienytė, LRC President, writes all our grant requests and keeps the financial machinery of the Center rolling.

After Eagle Scout candidate Aras Daulys and his team of twenty Lithuanian boy scouts and community volunteers made a nice "dent" in our "American Press about Lithuania" newspaper clippings project on February 2nd of this year, we decided to actively continue the clippings project. With some steady volunteer aid, the organized articles of our newspaper project have now grown to about five times the size it was just last year! Approximately two-thirds of the news stories feature the years 1990 and 1991.

Enata Skrupskelis, our volunteer librarian, has worked tirelessly cataloging books. Volunteers Rima Bučinskienė and Andrius and Paulius Vitas have aided tremendously in much library reorganization work. University of Illinois Lithuanian Culture class student Steve Frost volunteered at the Center organizing and filing brochures and



Left to right: Vidmantas Valiušaitis, Valiušaitis's hosts while in the Chicago area – Rima Žiūraitis and Aušra Tallat-Kelpša – and Dr. Indrė Antanaitis-Jacobs. March 12th, LRC, Lemont. Photo by Gailė Vitas.

pamphlets of various Lithuanian culture programs spanning over a century.

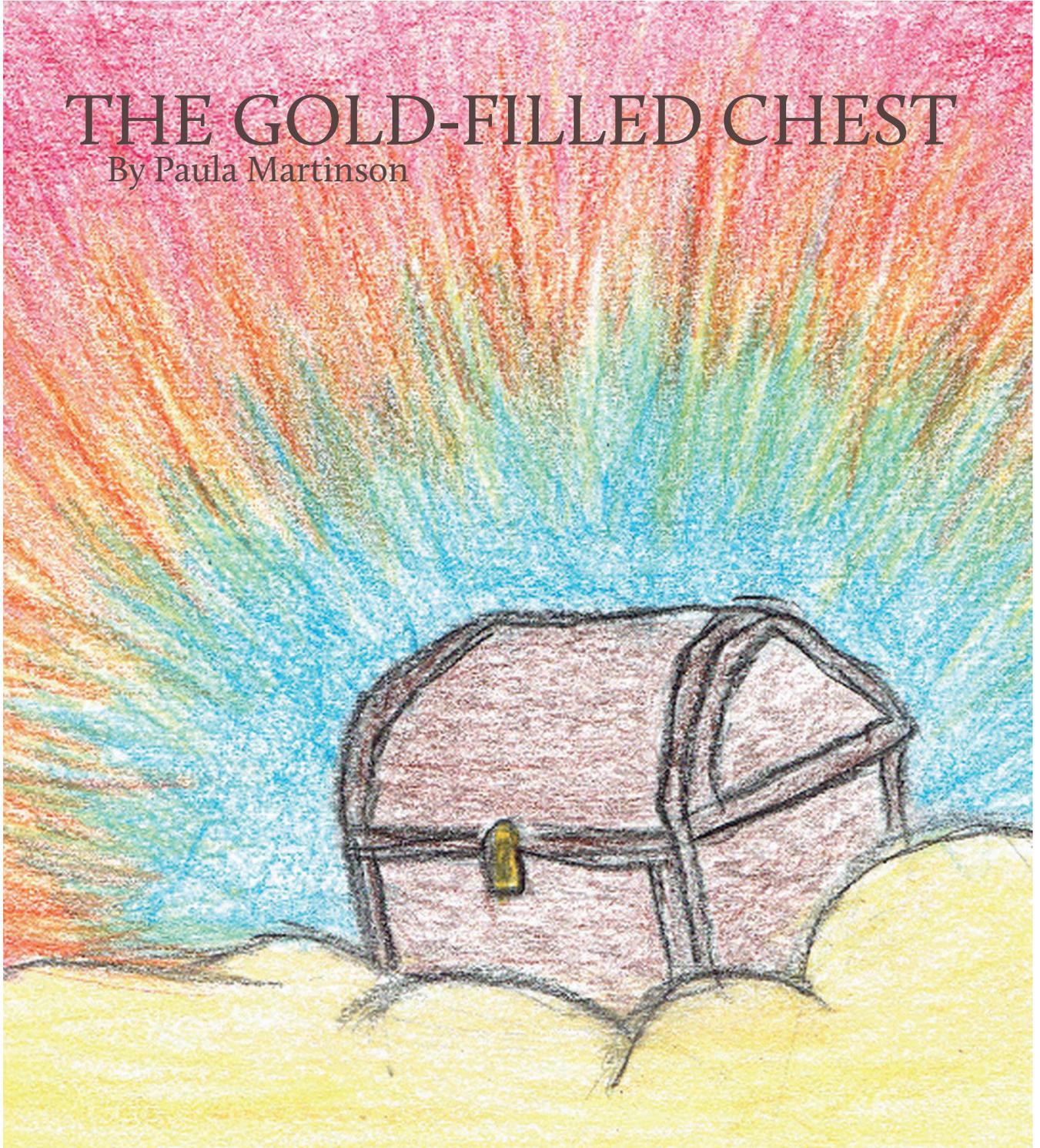
In mid-March we had an unexpected researcher pay us a visit – Vidmantas Valiušaitis, a journalist and Head Researcher of the Information Analysis Unit Research Department of the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania. Mr. Valiušaitis spent one long day scouring through our copies of 1941-1945 "Vienybė", a historic Lithuanian daily newspaper that Valiušaitis said that he could find absolutely nowhere else in either Lithuania or the U.S. The next day, Valiušaitis thoroughly reviewed the archive of journalist and writer Liudas Dovydenas. Unfortunately, Mr. Valiušaitis had to cut his intended third day of research with us short because it was precisely during his visit that certain travel restrictions due to the coronavirus were beginning to take effect.

We all currently are uncertain when travel and quarantine restrictions due to COVID-19 will be lifted, and whether or not other researchers who are planning to study at our Center this May and June will be able to carry out their plans in their desired time frame. But we at the Center have had much experience with waiting this past year and wish to reassure prospective researchers that "patience is golden" and good things really do come to those who wait!

For any queries about hours and any research or other concerns, please call the Lithuanian Research Center at 773-434-4545. This telephone number has been transferred from our Chicago location to our Lemont location where we now have a larger presence. Or you can e-mail us [office@lithuanianresearch.org](mailto:office@lithuanianresearch.org) We look forward to hearing from you soon!

# THE GOLD-FILLED CHEST

By Paula Martinson



"Gold-filled Chest", a drawing by Paula Martinson.

A man walked along the beach near his village early one morning when he saw a wooden chest sticking out of the sand. He heard the rumors around the village for years of a sunken pirate ship beyond the bay with chests full of

gold. The man ran over to the chest to get a better look. He tried to open it, but a lock held it shut. He tried to lift it but it was so heavy, the man could barely hoist it a foot off the ground. He quickly buried the chest and marked

the spot with a stick. He then came back later that night with his old horse and a rusty wagon. He managed to slide the chest onto the wagon and rode toward home, very pleased with himself.

As he entered the village, several villagers swarmed around his wagon, staring in awe at the chest. He told them to go away and leave him alone. The man came to his hut and he hid the chest in his basement. There he worked all night trying to open the rusted lock. He eventually realized he needed help from someone with better tools and more skill to do it. That morning he loaded the chest back into the wagon and rode to the shop of an old friend. The friend worked with many tools and could repair almost anything.

"Would you mind helping me open this chest?" asked the man.

"Only if you give me half of what's in it," replied his old friend.

The man did not want to give up half of his possible gold so he turned down the offer and moved on. He asked many people for help. None of them wanted to do the job for free, knowing the possible riches inside of the chest. The last place the man ended up was a poor locksmith at the edge of the village.

The man asked the locksmith if he could just help him unlock the chest with no charge.

"Of course!" replied the locksmith. "I would love to help out a nice man."

This surprised the man after his previous encounters.

"Thank you, sir," he said with praise.

The master locksmith worked with the lock for only a couple of minutes, and it came apart. "You should open the chest. It is yours," said the locksmith.

The man smiled and quickly opened the chest, only to find not gold, not pearl necklaces, not diamonds, but rocks. Rocks filled the whole chest. The man gasped and yelled with anger since the rocks did not make him rich.

"Oh my, I'm so sorry sir," said the locksmith, feeling the man's disappointment.

"Quiet," spat back the man! He fumed and kicked the dirt floor. He spent all night and his whole day trying to open a chest full of rocks. "Just keep the whole thing," the man said as he hurried out of the shop.

As soon as the man left, an idea popped into the locksmith's head. He grabbed a large hammer and smashed several of the rocks. Upon impact the rocks cracked open, revealing an ore inside, rich with gold. The locksmith smiled. All this gold was right in front of him. He could be a very rich man. But the locksmith knew that the gold should go to the man who brought it in. The next morning the locksmith lugged the chest full of golden ore all the way back to the man's house. The locksmith owned no horse or wagon, but he used his strength. People stared

at the muscled locksmith as he sweated and heaved the heavy chest through the village. When he made it to the man's house, he knocked on the door.

The man opened the door and stared at the locksmith and then down to the wooden chest. "I told you that you can keep it, said the man with an annoyed tone.

"Yes, I know, but I thought you might want it back anyway," said the locksmith. The man rolled his eyes and hesitantly accepted it.

"Open it," said the locksmith.

"It's only rocks. Didn't you see?" said the man.

"Just open it," repeated the locksmith.

The confused man decided to follow the locksmith's suggestion to open the chest. There he saw many broken rocks twinkling with gold, heavy ore inside each one, and he gasped with disbelief. Gold filled the chest after all! The man thanked the kind and generous locksmith and gave half of the rocks in the chest to him. Blessed with a new supportive friend because of his graciousness, the locksmith became the talk of the village. The locksmith's business bloomed since the villagers trusted him to do many jobs for them.

Paula Martinson



Born in the deep south of the United States of America, I moved to Virginia at the age of three. There I go to school, including a Lithuanian school on Saturdays to learn to speak, read and write Lithuanian. I enjoy reading and writing, sports, music, playing with friends and laughing. I also like to draw although I am not so good at that. My mom came from Lithuania and my dad's ancestors came from Norway and Ireland. We go visit parks and go hiking often with my rescue dog, Meila. I like to see nature such as waterfalls, animals and streams. I really enjoyed hiking to the top of Mount Rogers, the highest point in Virginia, with wild ponies all around. I call it Ponyland. I attended the Camp Neringa English speaking session for the past five years with my parents for two years and then by myself. It is a place of discovery and I look forward to going every summer.

# New England and Boston Lithuanian Community Members Help Out Those in Need During Covid-19 Pandemic

By Živilė Symeonidis



In response to the call of the World Lithuanian Community and the LAC National Board to organize Covid-19 campaigns in Lithuanian communities around the world, the LAC Boston Chapter organized a kugelis baking campaign for elderly and sick parishioners in Boston and its surroundings. Most of these people were very active members of the Lithuanian community and church for many years, and this was only a small token of thanks showing that they remain important and valued members of the community and are not forgotten. Most seniors were moved to tears as it was lovely to be

remembered, visited, or talked to on the phone. It was a great surprise for them. Fresh from the oven kugelis with bacon bits and sour cream and sausages with stewed cabbage were neatly packed in paper bags decorated with Lithuanian attributes and pictures of rue flower. It was the best gift because it came from the heart. The bags also contained hand sanitizer (provided by the scouts), a picture of the Mother of God, drawings by scouts, and a questionnaire on the needs of members of the Lithuanian community in New England, as well as relevant information about Covid-19. Not only the New England

District chapters participated in this campaign; the Scouts, South Boston Lithuanian Citizens Association, and St. Peter's Parish also took part. This campaign was a fun and unifying activity that has brought joy to both seniors and the organizers. Only by being together and taking care of each other, we can remain strong and overcome this disaster. The LAC Boston Chapter handed over the relay to the leadership of St. Peter's Church that plans to hold a similar campaign on May 30th. Good acts are contagious!



## Varškės Babka

(Cottage Cheese-enriched Babka)

By Jana Sirusaitė-Motivans



Lately, I have come to appreciate how truly creative Lithuanians can be with 'varškė,' usually translated as 'curd cheese.' I have been looking through my Lithuanian cookbooks and have compiled a list of recipes. We have varškėčiai (fried or boiled dumplings), varškės blynai (pancakes), neliesnikai (stuffed blintzes), varškės sausainiai (cookies), varškės spurgos (doughnuts), and varškės pyragas (cheese cake). Varškė can also be used to stuff baked apples or as a filling alternative for koldūnai or cepelinai. Varškė can also be pressed and dried to make our well-known sūris (cheese). This is probably just a partial list; I am sure that creative Lithuanians have many more recipes.

Beata Nicholson, the well-known cookbook author in Lithuania, amusingly writes "I can almost hear you: Honestly, here we go again with the cheese curd! As I've said, we Lithuanians really do love our cheese curd. You can make practically anything with it. It is suitable for either sweet or savory dishes." (Taste Lithuania 2016)

Ideally, you would use home-made fresh varškė for these recipes, but that is not very realistic. A good substitute is cottage cheese, drained through a sieve to

remove the excess water. Other good substitutes are ricotta or farmer cheese.

Last month I shared a recipe using farmer cheese for varškės sausainiai (cookies). This month I have a recipe that uses cottage cheese. Please feel free to experiment with these dairy products to find which you prefer.

The recipe I am sharing with you this month is an improvisation of a recipe that inspired me. Last month I wanted to bake Babka, which is traditionally served for Easter. Babka is usually made with yeast and is a time-consuming project. I love to bake, but have a fickle relationship with yeast, and prefer quick breads raised with baking powder. I came across a German recipe for stollen that contained cottage cheese and baking powder. Stollen, like babka, usually uses yeast. This non-traditional approach to stollen intrigued me. I adapted the recipe a bit, changing some of the ingredients. To my delight, I ended up with an easy to make, quick-baking, no yeast, varškės Babka! Keep in mind, this is not as light and airy as a traditional yeast-raised babka. The varškė makes a denser and moister loaf. Different, but delicious!

## Varškės Babka

(Cottage Cheese-enriched Babka)

### Ingredients

- 2 cups cottage cheese
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 4 cups flour
- 1/8 tsp salt
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 cup currants or raisins
- 3 eggs
- 1 tbsp butter, melted
- 1 tsp vanilla
- Powdered sugar for dusting

1. Preheat oven to 375°. Grease and flour a baking sheet, or line with parchment paper.
2. Puree the cottage cheese in a blender until it is smooth and lump-free.
3. Sift the flour and baking powder together into a large bowl.



4. Make an indentation in the center of the mixture. Add pureed cottage cheese, eggs, vanilla, sugar, salt, and currants into the indentation.



5. Mix to combine. Turn out onto a flour-coated surface.



6. Wet your hands to keep the dough from sticking and knead lightly. If it is too moist, add more flour. Shape into a loaf and place on the prepared baking sheet.



7. Bake 50-60 minutes or until a tester inserted in the center comes out clean.
8. Transfer to a cooling rack.
9. Brush melted butter over the warm loaf and sift powdered sugar over it.



10. Let cool and serve.

# our community

## The Lithuanian American Community News



Arvydas Urbonavičius, President of the National Executive Committee of the Lithuanian American Community, addresses the participants of the Šiupynys banquet. To his left, is Fr. Valdas Aušra.

We were all looking forward to a promising 2020. We had so many exciting, new, and positive events planned. These events had to enhance the lives of each of us as well as the life of the Community. Preparation for the long-planned events such as the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of Lithuanian Independence, the Lithuanian Folk Dance Festival, the LAC Council session, meetings

of the chairs of the LAC districts and chapters, concerts, festivals, exhibitions, and meetings required a lot of our energy and time. We are happy that some of them did take place and showed our ability to be organized, be creative, and work together. However, the global pandemic is changing our lives and our plans, and the LAC activities are no exception. Now we have to deal with many unforeseen issues, make quick decisions, and overcome emerging challenges daily.

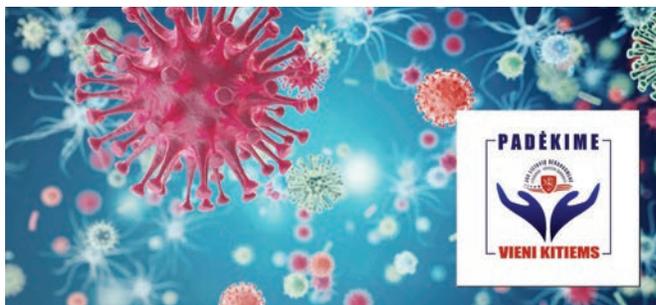
I am happy to see that the Lithuanian American Community is working together creatively using its know-how, time, and resources and helping its members during this difficult period that demands more strength and unity from us than ever before. I invite and urge everyone to continue to work together regardless of the distances that separate us.

Let us all stay healthy and strong.

*Arvydas Urbonavičius*

*President of the National Executive Committee of the Lithuanian American Community*

## The Lithuanian American Community Asks Everyone to Help One Another



In this difficult and challenging time, as the COVID-19 pandemic is raging across the world, the Lithuanian-American Community, in cooperation with the Lithuanian Embassy in Washington, invites you to work together. It has never been more meaningful and important to reach out and help one another. The Lithuanian American Community has formed a volunteer group that collects and coordinates information on the need for and assistance to Lithuanians in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. Group members are Vytautas Sruoga, Karolis Simulevičius, Karolina Orr, Juras Palukaitis, Loreta Timukienė, Inga Klimašauskienė, Juozas Polikaitis, Fr. Jaunius Kelpša, Diana Aleknaitė, Raminta Urbonavičienė, Fr. Valdas Aušra, Vilija Aukštuolis, Luka Šaparnytė, Artūras Žilys, Nerija Orentas, and Algis Mikuckis.

Please visit the LAC website at <https://covid19.javlb.org/>. Here you will find important information related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Please register if you need help. We also ask to register those who are willing to reach out to help. Many volunteers have already registered, and we are grateful to them!

Important information about COVID-19 can be found on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/939031316512217/>. On this Facebook group page, you can find answers to your questions.

The LAC has established a fund to help Lithuanian Lithuanians affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. You can donate to this fund on the gofundme page at [https://www.gofundme.com/f/34t92-a-cause-i-care-about-needs-help?utm\\_source=customer&utm\\_medium=copy\\_link&utm\\_campaign=p\\_cf+share-flow-1](https://www.gofundme.com/f/34t92-a-cause-i-care-about-needs-help?utm_source=customer&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_campaign=p_cf+share-flow-1). This way, we will do our best to help those who currently need help the most.

Let us all share our kindness, advice, volunteer work, knowledge, and financial support. By sharing, we will become richer and stronger, and our hearts will be filled with hope and faith. Let us all stay healthy and strong!

*The Lithuanian American Community National Executive Committee*

## The LAC National Executive Committee News



Lithuanian Americans in southwest Florida celebrate March 11th.



Lithuanian American in New York celebrate the 30th anniversary of Lithuanian Independence.

On February 16, we celebrated the 102nd anniversary of Lithuania's independence, and on March 11, we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the restoration of Lithuania's independence. On these important to us dates, concerts, meetings, and exhibitions were held, and Lithuanian flags were solemnly hoisted in many town squares. The LAC Public Affairs Council prepared a letter to the US government representatives in which the significance of these dates in the context of European and world events is described and Lithuania's most important recent achievements in the fields of politics, economics, science, and culture are listed.

During the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the restoration of Lithuania's independence in Chicago, Juozas Polikaitis, Chairman of the Social Affairs Council of the National Board of the Lithuanian Community of Lithuania, was awarded the Medal of Honor of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania. Congratulations to Juozas Polikaitis! We wish him good health and success in his meaningful and inspiring work!



Marija Čyvaitė, Vice President for Youth Affairs.

The LAC National Executive Committee was joined by two new members, Marija Čyvaitė, Vice President for Youth Affairs, and Svajūnas Masilionis, Vice President for Sports. On November 30 - December 1, 2019, Marija Čyvaitė participated in a training organized by the Lithuanian Department of Youth Affairs in Vilnius. The training was useful for establishing contacts with young people in other countries and sharing experiences. On January 22-26, 2019, the Vice President for Youth Affairs participated in the South American Lithuanian Youth Congress in Argentina as a representative of the LAC. At the congress, Marija presented the Mission Siberia project in which she participated; she also conducted discussions on the preservation of Lithuanian way of life, opportunities, and assistance.

In order to strengthen the religious awareness and upbringing of children and youth, Bible Camp for Children and Youth was held at the Ateitininkai House in Lemont, Illinois at the end of last year, thanks to G. Reinyš, a

## our community

member of the Council for Religious Affairs. Fr. Gediminas Keršys led a special evangelization course "Alfa" for children, parents, and teachers.

To save on the costs of printing and distributing the LAC publications in the USA, the rental of printing equipment was abandoned, and a less costly printing and distribution method was chosen. Bridges magazine now has a contract with the PrintingCenterUSA, a company that provides online services. Two issues of the magazine have already been published, and we are satisfied with the quality. Pensininkas magazine is now printed using a separate printing house, and JAV LB Naujienos is switching to the electronic format. We invite you to read the LAC publications and help us preserve the Lithuanian American Community press. You can subscribe to our magazines online at <http://www.lithuanian-american.org/lt/jav-lb-veikla/leidiniai/>. In the updated version of the LAC website you will find more news about the Lithuanian American Community and will be able to subscribe to the electronic version of our publications. You can find out the news of the Lithuanian Community in the USA by subscribing to the newsletter.

Now that our meetings are constrained by the COVID-19 virus pandemic, some LAC districts and chapters, as well as Lithuanian schools, are choosing to use remote communication methods. We would like to remind you that the LAC has free tools for such remote communication that you can also use for your meetings, voting, and classes.

- Google Meet can be used for video conferences. You can connect from your phone or computer.
- You can use Google Forms for electronic voting.
- You can use Google Docs and Google Sheets to manage your documents and store all your documents up to 30GB for free on Google Drive.

To use all these free tools, all you need to do is have an @javlb.org email address. If you want to be connected to these tools, request training or have other questions, email us at [it@javlb.org](mailto:it@javlb.org).

The third session of the LAC 22nd Council will be held on September 25-27, 2020 in Atlanta, Georgia.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference of the

chairs and representatives of the LAC districts and chapters that had to be held on April 25-26, 2020 has been postponed until further notice. We thank everyone who has registered.

The applications to the Lithuanian Foundation for financing various projects of the Lithuanian American Community were completed. The support provided by the Lithuanian Foundation provides the Lithuanian American Community with an opportunity to foster Lithuanian culture, traditions, education, centers of Lithuanian activities, and preserve Lithuanian identity in the diaspora.

This year, a census of the U.S. population is underway intending to count every person living in the U.S. According to the U.S. Constitution, a census must be conducted every 10 years. Census data is important. The census results will determine how many seats each state will have in Congress, delineate constituencies, and decide how more than \$675 billion in federal funding will be distributed to communities each year. Census information is confidential. Data is protected under federal law and may only be used for statistical purposes. It may not be used against you by any authority or court. The 2020 Census questionnaire will be mailed to everyone in the country. We encourage all persons of Lithuanian descent to participate in the census and, when providing information about themselves, to indicate that you are of Lithuanian origin. Participation in the census is our civic duty. It is a way to participate in the democracy of this country and at the same time boldly declare "I am Lithuanian!"

We invite you to visit the updated website of the Lithuanian American Community, where you will find the most important information on the organization's structure and activities. The website address is <https://javlb.org/>. A new business page has been created on the website which offers useful business-related information <http://javlb.org/veikla/>.

The creation of the Lithuanian American business professionals database is underway. Inga Klimašauskienė, the LAC National Board's Vice President for Business Affairs offers consultations regarding business partners, market searches, and other business-related issues. Her e-mail is [ekonomika@javlb.org](mailto:ekonomika@javlb.org). A North American Lithuanian Business Forum is planned to take place in 2021 in Philadelphia. The exact date will be announced later.

## Culture



The fourth international children's festival.

In February, the fourth children's festival was organized by the Suktinis Lithuanian folk dance group, led by Giedrė Knieža, Chair of the Cultural Council. This year, about 120 dancers of Grandis, Spindulys, and Suktinis groups took part in the festival. The LAC Cultural Council contributed to this festival for the first time. Thanks to the Lithuanian Foundation and the Cultural Council, the Švyturys group could come to the festival from Cleveland, Ohio. To this day, it is the only festival of its kind for children that provides not only an opportunity to perform but also to make new friends.



Rock opera "Oath" in Chicago.

Thanks to the efforts of the LAC Cultural Council, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the restoration of independence, Lithuanians in Chicago and Los Angeles had the opportunity to see the rock opera "Oath" about partisans who defended our freedom in the post-war years. The premiere of "Oath" took place in 2018 in Lithuania. The creators and performers of this rock opera are the patriotic rock band Thundertale, opera soloists Liudas Mikalauskas, Egidijus Bavikinas, and Sandra Lebrikaitė; the author of the libretto is Gediminas Jankus. It is gratifying that the halls in both Chicago and Los Angeles were full. We are grateful to the Lithuanian Foundation, the main sponsor, and the main organizer, Žygis Janus, as well as the LAC Chicago District, the

World Lithuanian Center, the Lithuanian Rotary Club of Chicago, the Lithuanian Opera in Chicago, and everyone whose efforts allowed us to enjoy this joint project.



Biru Bar performs for Omaha Lithuanians.

The Lithuanians of Omaha solemnly commemorated the state holidays. The audience was entertained by the Biru Bar group from Indianapolis. Such visits by performers to small chapters of the Lithuanian American Community are possible only thanks to the Lithuanian Foundation and the LAC Culture Council.

On the occasion of the Year of World Lithuanians, the Culture Council supported the Baltic Film Festival in Boston, which has been taking place for a few years. Lithuanian film festivals in major US cities are expected to become one of the most important events supported by the Cultural Council. We are glad that the Colorado chapter is not far behind the big cities. With the support of the Cultural Council, it organizes the presentation of Lithuanian films to its community.

The Cultural Council supported the participation of the Waukegan chapter in one of the largest cultural fairs in the state of Wisconsin. Lithuanian culture and traditions were showcased at the fair.

It is unfortunate that due to the pandemic, many planned events had to be postponed. Singer Gintarė Jautakaitė's concerts in five districts and poetry discussions in Portland were canceled. "Poetry Spring" took place online. Klaipėda Youth Theater performances and many more events were canceled. We hope that art lovers will be patient, and after the pandemic, we will be able to enjoy various cultural events once again. Although during the

# our community

## Sports



Arvydas Sabonis with the organizers of the Lithuanian Basketball House fundraiser.

On February 15, a charity event to support the Lithuanian Basketball House project took place at the Grand Dukes Restaurant in Downers Grove, Illinois. The event was organized by the Lithuanian Basketball Federation, the Lithuanian Basketball League in Chicago, the Consulate General of the Republic of Lithuania in Chicago, the ŠALFASS, and the Lithuanian American Community. The LAC contributed by advertising the event; some members attended. The project was presented by Arvydas Sabonis, President of the Lithuanian Basketball

Federation. The Basketball House will be located in Kaunas, near Santaka Park. It will be a multifunctional center, where the history of Lithuanian basketball and the most important achievements will be presented in a modern and contemporary way. Currently, the project is under development/construction (the construction progress can be followed online at [www.parama.krepsioniamai.lt](http://www.parama.krepsioniamai.lt)). It is planned that the construction of the building will be completed early next year; then the museum will be opened. An American company Ralph Appelbaum Associates ("RAA") is helping with the installation of the museum. It is believed that the museum could work at full capacity already in 2021 or at the latest in 2022 when the centenary of Lithuanian basketball will be commemorated. The museum's strategy is aimed at both Lithuanian consumers and foreign tourist groups. We aim to have all Lithuanian students visit the museum within a few years of its opening, and this would be one of the biggest attractions for foreign tourists.

In the Fan Court next to the Basketball House, there will be 6,000 brass tiles on which fans will be able to inscribe desired words (name, surname, city).

Lithuanians were generous in donating at the charity auction. Almost \$13,000 were raised for the Lithuanian Basketball House! But most importantly, a lot of people had a chance to find out about this unique project. Event sponsors were Unlimited Carrier, Tower Communications Expert, GP Transco, and Viga Design.

## Education



Saint Casimir's Lithuanian School students study online.

Although during the pandemic Lithuanian schools are closed, teaching takes place online. The LAC Board of Education is grateful to everyone who shares the links and know-how. Some teachers have more experience in using online tools, while for others, it is a new experience. The most important thing is the desire to work together, share, and learn together with children and parents. We wish everyone success. Let us not give in to adversity.

You can learn more about Lithuanian education by visiting:

- The Education Council's website at <https://svietimotaryba.org/?fbclid=IwAR3yAqI-9Chv7c5Cff9H0NHZ-RDJpttliIG8zBkPa82f2PIJa-goB-hrC20>
- Facebook account at <https://www.facebook.com/javlb.svietimotaryba/>
- By subscribing to the Education Council newsletter <https://svietimotaryba.org/naujienlaskiu-archyvas/>



The Lithuanian American Community Board of Education held a meeting on April 17, 2020, during which the 2019 Amber Apple Award winner was elected. The Amber Apple Award for Lithuanian school teachers has been established in 2001. The patron of the \$1,000 award is the Lithuanian Foundation.

Aldona Šileikytė-Marijošienė, a long-time teacher at the Maironis Lithuanian School (NY), was awarded the title of Meritorious Educator and a \$1,000 prize. The Amber Apple Award and prize were awarded to Loreta Lagunavičienė, a teacher at the Maironis Lithuanian School (IL), and Vitalija Virbukienė, a teacher at St. Casimer Lithuanian School (Los Angeles, CA).



Representatives of the Atlanta Community Board and school leaders. From left: Juras Palukaitis, Šarūnė Stankevičienė, Virginija Šileikaitė, Margarita Austin, Juozas Kazlauskas, and Dalia Gatautienė.

At the end of the school year, representatives of the Lithuanian American Community visited the Saulė Lithuanian School in Atlanta and thanked its principal and teacher, Virginija Šileikaitė-Thoresen for her sincere and dedicated work. Virginija has worked in this school for 11 years, during which the school has grown to more than 40 students! Margarita Austin will take the helm of the school now. We wish the new principal and the entire school community further growth and good luck.



DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC  
 THE XVI LITHUANIAN FOLK DANCE FESTIVAL  
 IS RESCHEDULED TO THE WEEKEND OF  
 AUGUST 6-8, 2021.

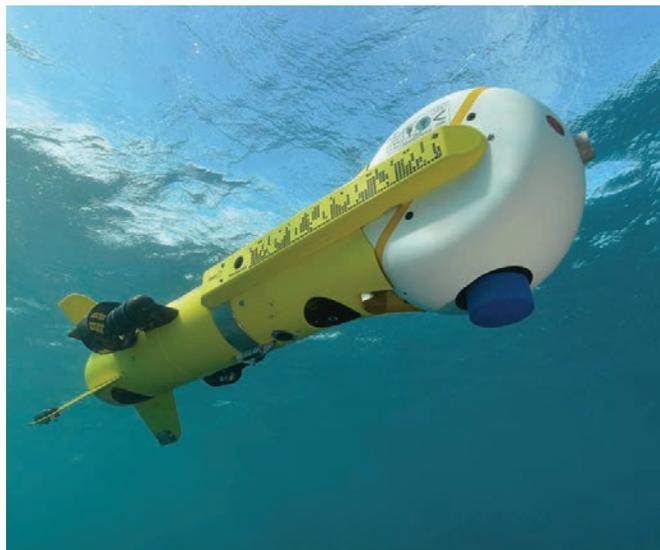
# current events

## Security

...Preparations for Defender-Europe 20, which was planned to be the largest exercise in Europe in 25 years, were halted in mid-March as the coronavirus halted the movement of personnel and equipment. Instead of 20,000 U.S. troops, only 6,000 were positioned in Europe when the plans were changed. The armored brigade combat team will conduct gunnery and combined training activities with allies as part of a modified Allied Spirit exercise. The summer maritime exercise, Baltic Operations, known as "Baltops", will most likely be modified. The U.S. Air Force General Tod Wolters, who is also NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, said that NATO's critical missions of air policing and enhanced forward presence battle groups in Poland and the Baltics will remain strong.

...A NATO supported Strategic Airlift Capability supplied a C-17 Globemaster transport plane to deliver medical supplies and equipment from China to Bulgaria and moved three Americans from Kabul, Afghanistan to Germany for treatment for COVID-19.

...The Lithuanian Navy has ordered additional K-STER mine disposal remotely operated vehicles (ROV) from ECA Group of France which is well respected for its expertise in robotics, automated systems, simulation, and industrial processes. The Navy has used ECA Group's expendable ROVs since 2009. Designed with tiltable shape charge, the K-STER can neutralize all kinds of mines from sea bottom mines, floating mines, historical mines to the smartest mines. Its unique propulsion architecture allows to stand strong water currents and approach the mine to its closest.



...Michael Pompeo, U.S. Secretary of State, wrote to Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis, requesting that Lithuania not ratify the European Union's cooperation agreement with Cuba as a symbol of support for the Cuban people. Lithuania is the only EU member that has not yet ratified the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA) between the EU and the Cuban government signed in 2016. The Seimas Committee on Foreign Affairs approved the ratification in February 2020 but Lithuania has not approved the PDCA. Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius said that while Lithuania is not an enthusiastic supporter of the EU-Cuba pact, it should not be the only one blocking it. The Minister felt that the EU participation in the PDCA helps weaken the influence of China and Russia in Cuba, but the U.S. is against the pact because Cuba supports President Maduro in Venezuela.

## Covid-19 Pandemic

...The first coronavirus case was confirmed in Lithuania to a 39-year-old woman who had returned to Kaunas after a trip to Verona, Italy. The woman was admitted to the Šiauliai Hospital, and three of her relatives were put under observation. Over time, others returning from Spain, Italy, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Austria, South Africa, Czechia, Netherlands, Cuba, and the UK tested positive.

...Lithuania's Minister of Health, Aurelijus Veryga, approved 3 businesses for manufacturing disinfectant products to moderate the current shortage and meet the estimated need of 7 tons per day. Vilniaus Degtinė, the largest producer of ethyl alcohol and spirits in the Baltic nations, and MV Group Production, another distiller were approved. They are joined by a cosmetics company, BLOK Laboratory.

...More than 5,000 Lithuanians returned home from Spain, Italy, France, and the UK to escape the pandemic. However, the Health Ministry quarantined them by groups in two or three-star hotels under police guard. The ensuing disobedience and violence resulted in changes in the quarantine to self-isolation at home, and the Health Ministry is working with the Interior Ministry to track people using their mobile phones.

...Estonia reported an unusually large number of COVID-19 cases after a professional volleyball team, Power Valley, from Milan, Italy participated in a tournament on Saaremaa Island, followed by a champagne party. Although it has only 2.5% of the population (33,000), it accounted for 50% of hospitalized patients in Estonia.

...Lithuania closed its borders to nearly all foreigners, and Lithuanians were banned from leaving the country, except for business trips, truck drivers, diplomats, and people passing through the country on their way home. It also closed all pubs, restaurants, and shops, except grocery stores.

...The first COVID-19 death was confirmed of an 83-year old woman from Ukmergė, northwest of Vilnius. Shortly thereafter, the second COVID-19 death was reported of a 90-year old woman who was infected at a hospital in Ukmergė, discharged, and admitted to Santaros Klinikos in Vilnius, where she succumbed the next day. This event was followed by the third death in Ukmergė Hospital and the fourth death in Panevėžys. The fifth death was reported in Klaipėda - a 94-year old with several chronic diseases. The sixth death was reported in Ukmergė of a 75-year old with several chronic diseases, and the seventh death was reported in Klaipėda. The eighth COVID-19 death was reported of a 77-year old patient from the Ukmergė Hospital who had been transferred to a hospital in Vilnius. With the large number of fatalities occurring in Ukmergė, the Health Ministry decided to extend testing of Ukmergė residents and set up a mobile checkpoint but decided against introducing restrictions on movement, except to recommend refraining from unnecessary trips. Eight medical staff from the local hospital tested positive.

...Eight members of the NATO multinational battalion were confirmed positive for COVID-19, and five from the Netherlands have been transported to their home country.

...Former President Dalia Grybauskaitė is the chairwoman of a new fund that has accepted over 1 million euros from various Lithuanian business organizations (including 100,000 from SEB Bank Lithuania) to attack the economic and social consequences of COVID-19.

...Laisvės TV collected over 830,000 euros, and Tomas Ok Man collected 300,000 euros to buy various protective equipment for medical workers, while Coca Cola and Neptūnas donated large stocks of drinks to hospitals.

...A Ukrainian report from the Beijing Academy of Military Medical Sciences found an aerosol with COVID-19 at 4 meters (13 feet) from a diseased person but noted that at such a distance the coronavirus did not retain the ability to infect in all cases. They found that half of the soles of hospital staff carried the virus and could be the carriers of the disease.

...Thermo Fisher Scientific Baltics will produce 20,000 COVID-19 tests per week for Lithuania under a contract for 100,000 tests valued at 2 million euros.

...President Gitanas Nausėda had a telephone conversation with the President of South Korea Moon Jae-in during which he solicited advice on managing COVID-19 and discussed bilateral cooperation regarding medical equipment, protective gear, and reagents.

...Health Minister Aurelijus Veryga announced that front-line medical workers of the COVID-19 pandemic will receive a 15% pay increase.

...The COVID-19 pandemic can be followed via [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020\\_coronavirus\\_pandemic\\_in\\_Lithuania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_coronavirus_pandemic_in_Lithuania)

### **Business**

...Under European Union mandates, Lithuanian Seimas was supposed to pass a pollution tax on tractors, combines, and other agricultural vehicles in 2007 with a 3-year transition for all machines greater than 70,000 watts (94 hp.). The Agriculture Ministry calculates that if Seimas does not pass the pollution tax which is incurred every time the vehicle is registered, including the initial purchase and every time ownership changes, Lithuania farmers would face sanctions worth 34 million euros because they would not receive any support funds until they pay. The Environment Ministry suggests introducing such a tax for farmers as of 2021, and the state budget would receive around 1 million euros a year from the new tax. The tax would range from about 40 euros for 100 hp. to 600 euros, if the power exceeds 350 kilowatts (470 hp.).

...The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, signed a draft law on labor migration relating to the protection of rights of workers of Ukraine and Lithuania and their legal employment. The Lithuanian Seimas previously voted in favor of a similar law. The agreement is meant to stem illegal and unprotected work in both countries; Ukraine has a high level of unemployment, and qualified specialists from Lithuania can pursue work in Ukraine.

...The Lithuanian-Belarus-Ukraine volume of Viking container train transportation increased by 21% from January 2018 to January 2019, linking Black Sea-Baltic Sea traffic with a route of 1,753 km. The Viking train route connects a chain of container and piggyback lines in the Baltic region with a similar system in the Black, Mediterranean, and Caspian Seas.

## current events



...Lithuania is proposing to Kazakhstan to use its logistical and transportation assets to export goods to Europe via the One Belt One Road (OBOR) also known as The New Silk Road. Kazakhstan proposes that Lithuania use the Khorgos Gateway railroad hub and the Aktau seaport on the Caspian Sea as industrial zones. Kazakhstan is Central Asia's largest economy and has deposits of oil, copper, zinc, iron, chrome, aluminum, and uranium. Lithuanian proposes that Kazakhstan invest in Lithuanian multiple free economic zones.

...Linus Linkevičius, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, officially opened the Lithuanian Embassy in Abu Dhabi, capital of the seven-member United Arab Emirates. In 2018 the UAE had a population of 10 million, a GDP of \$414 Billion, and a per capita income of \$69,000 derived from oil exports. The legal system is a mix of civil and Islamic law with limited suffrage. Dubai, the other large city in UAE, is the location of the largest building in the world, the Burj Khalifa, at 2,722 feet and 163 floors.

...FL Technics, a unit of the Lithuanian Avia Solutions Group (ASG) that provides aircraft maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) services, has purchased Flash Line Maintenance, an Italian provider of MRO services, and now comprises 50 stations across Europe. Clients include British Airways and Wizzair. ASG, with 1,200 employees, has offices in Lithuania, the UK, Indonesia, Thailand, and China.

...The largest private equity investment fund in the Baltic region, INVL Baltic Sea Growth Fund, has completed its final close of 164.7 million euros. It plans on investing in a diversified portfolio 8-12 investments of 10 to 30 million euros focusing on buyout and "buy and build" opportunities. The lead investor with 30 million euros is EIF which is part of the European Investment Bank and includes funds from the Baltic Innovation Fund which is supported by the governments of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia as well as private and corporate investors. The fund is focused on the Baltic nations as well as Poland, Scandinavia, and Central Europe.



### General

...Although Lithuania does not recognize homosexual marriages, Lithuania's Constitutional Court recognized same-sex marriages performed abroad and ruled that Lithuania had to issue a residence permit to a male foreigner who married a male Lithuanian citizen in accord with a Western European level of tolerance. The Catholic Church of Lithuania disagreed, saying that it deepened divisions between marriage and family and made a step towards making homosexual relations equal to family.

...Under the auspices of the Lithuanian National Olympic Committee, Former President Dalia Grybauskaitė, the Minister of Education, Science and Sport Algirdas Monkevičius, and other prominent figures of the Lithuanian sports community gathered at the Akropolis in Vilnius for a United Nations' HeForShe event promoting gender equality in sport. Launched in 2014 with a speech by Emma Watson, the U.N. HeForShe campaign gathered 100,000 members, including President Barack Obama.

...Ending on a positive note: According to the European Plastics Pact, Lithuania is commended because it recycles 92% of bottles and cans.



In Memoriam to our Community Members

The Lithuanian American Community is saddened by the loss of its active members who left a vivid imprint on the activities of the Community and in the memory of those who knew them.



Member of the New York community, sports enthusiast  
**Stanislovas Kavaliauskas**  
 1966-2020



Member of the San Diego community, founder of the Klumpė and Jūra dance groups  
**Giedrė Milašius**  
 1940-2020



Member of the LAC and the World Lithuanian Community  
**Algimantas Gureckas**  
 1923-2020



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