

# bridges



LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

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October 2021



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# bridges

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## from the editor

Dear readers,

In the October issue of Bridges you will read about the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Lithuanian American Community, the visit of Lithuanian President and First Lady, the activities of Knights of Lithuania, as well as a review of the new book by Gordon Mott.

Here I would like to share a letter from our reader, Nijolė Benokraitienė of Durham, North Carolina, with you.

*"We enjoy Bridges very much. Kudos to you, your staff, and writers for such informative articles and interesting photos!"*

*A few years ago, either Bridges or Lithuanian Heritage published an article about the Daughters of Lithuania, LA chapter. We were so impressed with their work, we've been sending them annual donations. I've also wanted to support women's and children's domestic violence centers Lietuvoj, but haven't been able to locate such groups by googling around.*

*What about other reputable and dedicated organizations—besides Daughters of Lithuania—that provide important social, monetary, and cultural services to native-born Lithuanians? Bridges would provide a valuable resource to its readers by compiling a list of such organizations that include their purpose, goals, financial management and stability, size of target population, efficiency, success, and so on. I'm ambivalent about including U.S. groups (e.g., Neringa, šeštadienio mokyklos, skautai) because articles in Bridges, Lithuanian Heritage, and Draugas News already furnish information about them."*

*If you know of such organizations, please write to me and I will share the information. Here is one letter I received:*

*"These three organizations that are quite well known and respected in the Lithuanian American community—all provide support for various marginalized or at-risk groups in Lithuania.*

- 1. Child's Gate to Learning/Vaiko vartai į mokslą. Website: <http://childgate.org>. Established in 1998, Child's Gate to Learning supports eight after-school and day centers that work with children and youths from at-risk and economically disadvantaged families.*
- 2. Lithuanian Catholic Religious Aid, Inc. Website: <https://lcaid.org>. Since 1961, LCRA continues to provide funding to projects that include spirituality and religious education programs of parishes and dioceses in Lithuania and its diaspora.*
- 3. Sunlight Children's Aid/Saulutė. Website: <https://sunlightchildrensaid.org/>. SCA provides support to children in Lithuania who are experiencing financial hardships, living with disabilities, or in dire circumstances."*

Wishing you a pleasant and fulfilling fall,  
Karilė Vaitkutė  
Editor



The successful history of the Lithuanian American Community has been built by Lithuanians of all ages and generations - our grandparents, great-grandparents, parents, and us. The Act of Incorporation of the Lithuanian American Community, adopted by the Provisional Organizing Committee, was officially published and solemnly signed at the Lithuanian American Community Celebration on November 18, 1951. New York. The events celebrating this anniversary were designed to show ourselves and the world that the LAC is strong, changing, and looking to the future with resolute hope. The banner with your signatures traveling through our communities proves that we are able to act, even in difficult circumstances. The pandemic has not broken us! The exhibition is a testament to the Lithuanian-American community's ability to act in the face of difficulties and challenges. The stories of "The Lithuanian Gene" remind us who we are, what makes us

strong, what is important to us, and what helps us not to lose our identity, to preserve our identity. The mural on the wall of the Lithuanian World Centre is preservation of memory and an obligation for future generations. And the Ideas Fair is our future, searching, creating, working together with other Lithuanian organizations. On this beautiful anniversary, I would like to congratulate you, dear Lithuanian-Americans, and to thank you for your tireless desire to foster Lithuanian identity, language, traditions, and culture, and to pass all of this on to future generations. Wishing you strength, harmony, and undying energy in our large LAC family.

Sincerely,  
Arvydas Urbonavičius  
The LAC President

GREETINGS FROM THE  
PRESIDENT OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA  
**GITANAS NAUSEDA**  
ON THE OCCASION OF  
THE 70<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE LITHUANIAN  
COMMUNITY IN THE U.S.

Dear Members of the Lithuanian American Community,

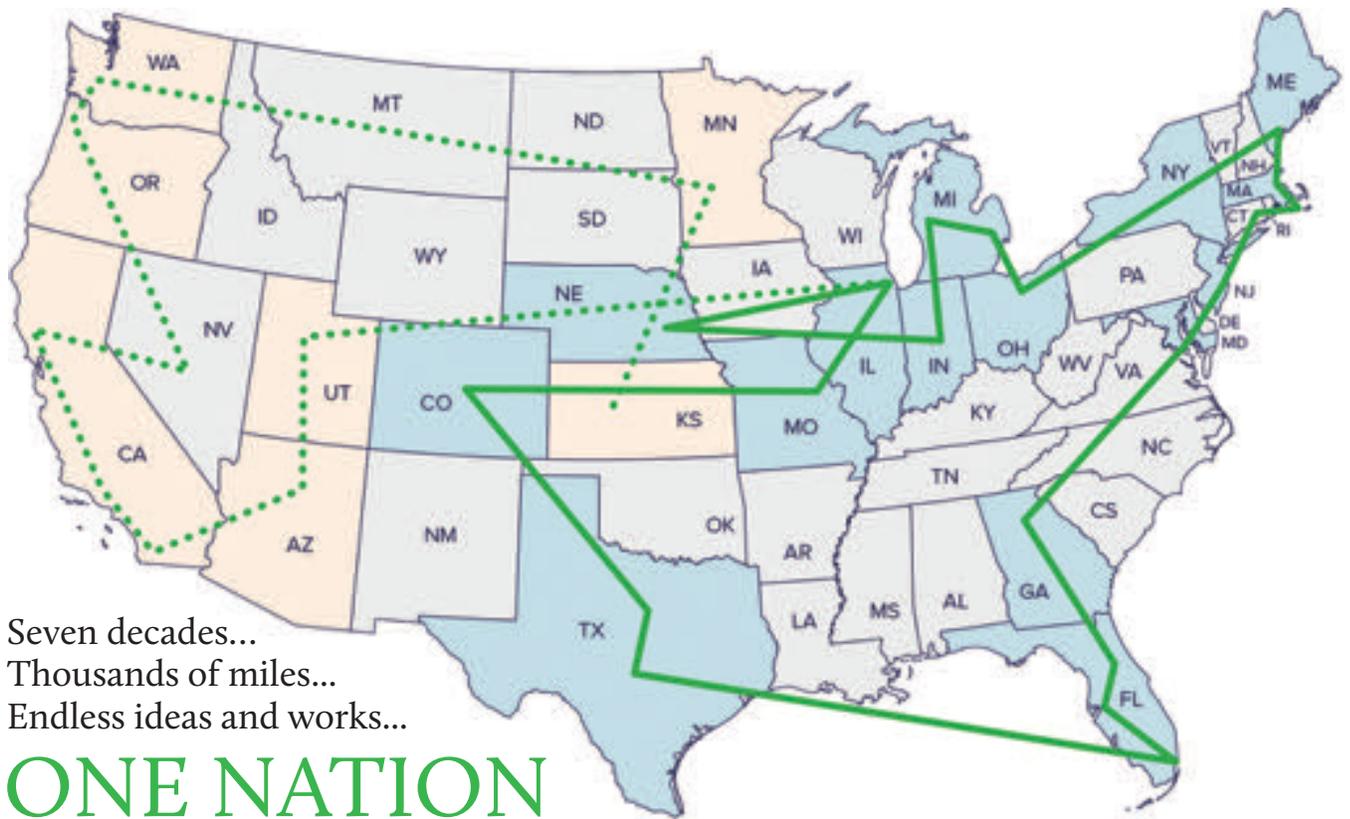
Congratulations on your 70th anniversary! This honorable anniversary is a great opportunity to once again celebrate and appreciate the history of the Lithuanian diaspora and the work that has been done to restore and maintain Lithuanian statehood. Lithuanian-American support has been crucial to the Lithuanian state during difficult historical periods. From the late 19th century until 1918, during the First Republic of Lithuania and after the loss of independence, as well as on the path to recognition and consolidation of statehood, there was a strong message of freedom and hope coming from across the Atlantic. I am happy to say that our diaspora has never stopped working and has made the most of "American life" for the sake of Lithuania. Lithuanians in the United States have made a significant contribution to Lithuania's international recognition, have supported their compatriots, and have fostered their children's Lithuanian identity by creating a tradition of Lithuanian language education. Today this tradition is crucial to maintaining the ties of the next generation of the diaspora with Lithuania. Lithuanian media in the USA is also a great example of Lithuanian heritage. The publications *Amerikos Lietuvis*, *Lituanus*, and *Draugas* have for many years disseminated information about Lithuania and the Lithuanian diaspora and became an important source of Lithuanian writing. "American Voice" has played an exceptional role in maintaining the Lithuanian diaspora spirit, and at the same time hope for freedom in occupied Lithuania.

Today, the independent Lithuanian state and society thank Lithuanian Americans for their conscious commitment to Lithuania, for their fight using their "work, science, wealth and sacrifice, to defend and preserve the



independent state of Lithuania." Thank you for keeping the commitment that was inscribed into "The Lithuanian Charter" in 1949. We need your help, your loyalty, and your love for Lithuania, and we will always need them.

Gitanas Nausėda,  
President of the  
Republic of Lithuania



Seven decades...  
 Thousands of miles...  
 Endless ideas and works...

# ONE NATION

## The Journey of the Flag

For seventy years, the flag of one of the world's most active Lithuanian organizations, the Lithuanian Community of the USA, has been flying proudly. It is the flag of the United Lithuanian Communities, one of the most active Lithuanian organizations in the world. The seventieth year of the Community is like a threshold on which we pause to take stock of our ambitions and accomplishments and to honor the people who have contributed to fostering Lithuanian identity.

One of the initiatives marking the anniversary year is the Flag Road, which began in Chicago in February. Lithuanians living in the USA sent the seventieth anniversary Unity Flag from district to district, marking the meaningful community anniversary with events. At each point along the way, it called the children of the Lithuanian nation to come together, reminding them that our strength is in unity. This historic project connected virtually all Lithuanian Americans into one big and wonderful family, undaunted by distance, time, and pandemic. All Lithuanian communities wanted to participate. The Flag Road became a symbolic action that united Lithuanians spread across the country.



The Flag of Unity was proudly passed from hand to hand. It flew proudly and returned to Chicago in September. Future generations will be able to relive its legendary journey in a film created from the celebratory moments captured by the initiative's participants.

Follow the journey of the flag: <https://javlb.org/70th/>

# The Tree Of Life Fresco At The World Lithuanian Center



Artist Rolandas Dabrukas was born in 1978 in Druskininkai. After graduating from Šiauliai Pedagogical University in Lithuania, he chose to continue his education in America at Western Connecticut University, where he studied illustration and obtained a Master's degree. He currently teaches art at Barnsdall Art Center and Dixie Elementary School. In his spare time, he enjoys mural painting, drawing, photography, and even sculpture. He also spends some of his free time dancing folk and ballroom dances.

*"I wanted to present this Unity Tree to Lithuania and America, to Lithuanians that live in Lithuania and Lithuanians that live in America. I wanted to show what is still important to Lithuanians scattered all over the world but connected by invisible ties that come from the love for their homeland, culture, dance, writing, and art. Ancient symbols used in folk art help us reconstruct the ideas of our ancient faith. A spindle with beautiful ornaments seems to tell us that flax was perceived by our ancestors as the Tree of Life, the embodiment of the mysterious miracle of life that brings goodness, wealth, and health."*

– Rolandas Dabrukas



# Online Exhibition: Lithuanian American Community, 1951-2021



Jonas Balkūnas drafted the LAC Statute and by-laws. Photo by Vytautas Maželis

As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Lithuanian American Community, we look back and see that the successful history of the organization has been built by Lithuanians of all ages and generations - our grandparents, our great-grandparents, our parents, and us. Today, we are proud that the Lithuanian American Community is the largest and strongest Lithuanian organization outside of Lithuania, actively contributing to the restoration of Lithuania's independence and

assisting Lithuania on important economic and democratic issues.

"The future of the Lithuanian Community in America (as everywhere else) depends on us. <...> The idea of the Lithuanian Community is big. The fate of Lithuanian identity is tied to it. That is why all Lithuanians should support and develop it in every way," wrote one of the founders of the Lithuanian Community, Stasys Barzdukas.

As we commemorate the anniver-

sary of the Community, we want everyone to find their own connection to this symbolic date, their own personal story, their own emotion, and tradition of celebration. We are not celebrating a single date, but 70 years of history that we have all been building together. So we invite you to a virtual exhibition that reflects the journey of several generations of Lithuanians in the United States and testifies that only we are strong in the community: <https://javlb.org/70th>

## Organization's History

In April 1951, the Lithuanian American Community formed a Temporary Organizing Committee (TOC), chaired by Prelate Jonas (John) Balkūnas. The TOC was composed of early diaspora public figures and post-war arrivals. They set to work to establish Lithuanian American Community (LAC).

On August 18-19, 1951, the celebration of the birth of the LAC Statute was organized.

On February 14, 1952, the Lithuanian American Community was officially incorporated in the State of Connecticut as a non-profit organization. Incorporators were Jonas Balkūnas, Dr. Petras Vileišis, Walter M. Chase, Frank J. Monchun, Antanas K. Saulaitis.

On 6 March 1952, the Provisional Statutes of the LAC were adopted.

For four years, the TOC coordinated the establishment of LAC units, held conferences with the leaderships of the old organizations, and otherwise worked in the life of Lithuanian-Americans.

The period of organization ended on May 1, 1955, with the election of the 1st Council of the LAC. The TOC had to create only the top of the Community. In all Lithuanian communities, there were societies, and



On November 18, 1951, a Lithuanian-American celebration was organized in New York, where the founding document of the Lithuanian American Community was announced and solemnly signed by its participants. Photo by D. Šulaitis

some of them were also organized into districts.

On December 30, 1973, the 1st North American Lithuanian Youth Congress was held in Cleveland, where the 1st Lithuanian American Youth Union (USA LSU). Stasys Barzdukas, a Lithuanian educator, was elected as the first chairman of the Lithuanian American Youth Council (he was the head of the 1st and 2nd (1955-1961)

On January 10, 1989, the Lithuanian Community was officially re-regis-



US President Ronald Reagan holding a "I Love Lithuanians" sticker made by the Gintaras Karosas' company "Baltic Associates", 1980

tered in Illinois. Incorporators were Dr. Antanas Razma, Birutė Jasaitienė, and Linas Norušis.

The LAC was founded to actively participate in the life of the United States and to be involved in its strug-

gle against communism, to preserve Lithuanian identity, and to maintain contacts with Lithuanians in other countries, support the work of Lithuania's liberation. According to the 1951 agreement with the Lithuanian



Lithuanian Americans demonstrating at the US Capitol (Washington, DC, June 1, 1990). Photo by Jacikevičius

## The LAC Executive Committee Presidents

1. Stasys Barzdukas (1955–1961)
2. Jonas Jasaitis (1961–1967)
3. Bronius Nainys (1967–1970)
4. Vytautas Volertas (1970–1973)
5. Juozas Gaila (1973–1976)
6. Algimantas Gečys (1976–1979)
7. Vytautas Kutkus (1979–1982)
8. Antanas Butkus (1982–1985);
9. Algimantas Gečys - Vytautas Volertas (1985–1988)
10. Antanas Razma (1988–1991)
11. Vytautas Maciūnas (1991–1994)
12. Regina Narušienė (1994–2000)
13. Algimantas Gečys (2000–2003)
14. Vaiva Vėbraitė-Gust (2003–2006)
15. Vytautas Maciūnas (2006–2012)
16. Sigita Šimkuvienė (2012–2018)
17. Arvydas Urbonavičius (2018–present)

## The LAC National Board of Directors Chairmen

1. Jonas Šlepetys (1955–1961)
2. Stasys Barzdukas (1961–1964)
3. Vytautas Volertas (1964–1967)
4. Juozas Kapočius (1967–1970)
5. Vytautas Kamantas (1970–1973)
6. Algis Rugienius (1973–1976)
7. Raimundas Kudukis (1976–1979)
8. Vytautas Izbickas (1979–1982)
9. Kazys Ambrozaitis (1982–1985)
10. Algis Rugienius (1985–1988)
11. Angelė Nelsienė (1988–1991)
12. Vytautas Kamantas (1991–1994)
13. Zigmantas Brinkis (1994–1997)
14. Donatas Skučas (1997–2000)
15. Regina Narušienė (2000–2006)
16. Danguolė Navickienė (2006–2009)
17. Juozas Polikaitis (2009–2018)
18. Nerija Orentienė (2018–2021)

American Council (LAC; its main goals are political), the Community was to be more concerned with the cultural and educational affairs of Lithuanian-Americans. The main goal of the Lithuanian American community was to preserve Lithuanian identity and pass it on to future generations. After the restoration of Lithuanian independence (1990), the most important task was to support the Republic of Lithuania, to take care

of Lithuanian education, cultural and scientific activities, education, social, economic, religious, sports, and other activities. The LAC cooperates with other Lithuanian American organizations, the U.S. non-governmental organizations and governmental institutions, introduces Lithuania to Americans, and is a member of the World Lithuanian Community.



On February 18, 2014, the Embassy of Lithuania hosted a meeting at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, DC. The Lithuanian American Community representatives were among the over 400 guests.



In 2016, members of the LAC XXI Council attended the North Atlantic Council Conference, meetings at the Senate and the White House, where the cooperation between the US and Lithuania was discussed.



Concert "We Were Born Lithuanians" commemorated the centenary of the Lithuanian State in Chicago, 2018. Photo by Jonas Kuprys

# KNIGHTS OF LITHUANIA 107th ANNUAL NATIONAL CONVENTION "Life, Growth, Change: Moving Forward Together"

Regina Juška-Švoba

Knights of Lithuania Supreme Council President, Honorary Member, and Public Relations Chair

All photos by Dave Boucher



The Knights of Lithuania annual convention participants, 2021

The Knights of Lithuania is a national Roman Catholic organization consisting of men and women of Lithuanian ancestry. Its motto is "For God and Country." The Knights of Lithuania's primary focus is to foster, maintain, and nurture an appreciation of the Lithuanian language, customs, traditions, and culture among its members. It further stresses the importance of the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. The Knights are actively involved in programs to assist their less fortunate brothers and sisters in Lithuania. There are currently four charity groups within the organization and function under the auspices of the Knights of Lithuania Charities. They are Knights of Lithuania Foundation, St. Casimir's Guild, Scholarship Fund, and Our Lady of Šiluva Fund. Aid to Lithuania, Inc. functioned from 1991 until it was suppressed in December 2007.

The Knights of Lithuania organization was founded by Mykolas Norkūnas in 1913, in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Currently, there are 40 councils in the United States with nearly 900 members. A National Convention is held annually at different state sites. In 2013 the Knights of Lithuania celebrated its Centennial Anniversary Convention in Quincy, Massachusetts. This year's Knights of Lithuania 107th 5th National Convention was hosted by the Supreme Council from September 11-12, 2021. The Embassy Suites Lake Buena Vista Hotel in Orlando, Florida was the home base for the convention. Due to the global Corona virus pandemic that has afflicted the world over the past 18+ months, this convention was a first of its kind in the Knights of Lithuania's organization history. It was a hybrid convention consisting of 36 in person and 55 Zoom delegates, clergy, and guests, who converged to



The banners of the Knights of Lithuania Convention and participating districts

participate in the 1-day long meeting, cultural activities, and banquet celebration.

Saturday, September 11, 2021

The 107th National Convention's opening Mass was celebrated at the Embassy Suites Lake Buena Vista Hotel in Orlando, Florida. Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis, Rector of the St. Casimir Pontifical College in Rome, Italy, who, due to Covid-19 pandemic, travel restrictions, and the commencement of the new school year at the Pontifical College in Rome, was unable to attend in person, cel-



Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis, Rector of the St. Casimir Pontifical College in Rome, Italy, celebrated the Mass via the Zoom platform

brated the Mass via the Zoom platform. The opening Mass was offered for the Knights of Lithuania organization, the success of the convention, people of Lithuania, those suffering, deceased members of the organization, and in remembrance of the 20th anniversary of those who perished on 09/11/2001. Hymns were led by Marytė Bizinkauskas, President of Council 1, Brockton, Massachusetts.

The first plenary session was also held at the Embassy Suites Buena Vista Hotel. The Knights of Lithuania National President and Honorary Member Regina Juška-Švoba officially opened the convention. Convention co-chair Robert A. Martin, Jr., HM led in the opening prayer. The singing of the National Anthems of the United States, the Republic of Lithuania, and the Knights of Lithuania was led by Marytė Bizinkauskas, C-1, Brockton, Michigan. The roll call of the Supreme Council Officers was led by National Recording Secretary Liza Macke. Robert A. Martin, Jr. HM welcomed all delegates and friends to Florida and wished everyone a good and memorable stay. The Zoom participants were also welcomed. The convention presidium was elected and consisted of and Michael Petkus, C-96, Dayton, Ohio and Dave Boucher, C-78, Lawrence, Massachusetts as co-chairs. Tom Miller, C-72, Binghamton, New York, served as secretary.

The cultural segment of the convention followed. A short film "They Could Have Been Saints" about the life and struggles of Mother Maria Kaupas, her founding of the Sisters of St. Casimir religious congregation in Chicago, Illinois and Lithuania was shown. (The brief documentary can be viewed on Catholic TV station ETWN or Youtube).

National President and Honorary Member Regina Juška-Švoba gave a comprehensive state of the organization report. Special prayers were said in memory of honorary members who passed away since the 2019 National Convention: National Spiritual Advisor Rev. Dr. Joseph Anderlonis, STD and former National Financial Secretary June V. Grenier. Also remembered was longtime mem-

ber Lillian Greymas, C-3 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who served on the mandate committee at many national conventions and was an active member in various capacities on the local and district level.

National treasurer and Debbie Martin-Rudmin gave a full financial report of the organization's status, presented the 2021-2022 budget, and answered many questions.

Robert A. Martin, Jr., HM, St. Casimir's Guild President, presented a report about the Guild's activities and the support to the St. Casimir's Pontifical Lithuanian College in Rome, Italy since 2019. There were 426 Mass requests: 296 Sympathy, 21 Special Intention, 68 Special Occasion, 21 Health, 14 Christmas, and 4 Easter. There were 37 additional donations. Donations in the amount of \$5,130 and \$13,000 (for the College's repairs received from the Knights of Lithuania Foundation during the 2019 convention) were wired to Rev. Arštikaitis. Preliminary discussions have commenced about a Guild-sponsored tour to Rome, Italy in 2023, for the 75th Anniversary of the College. The exact date of the anniversary celebration must be determined by Archbishop Gintaras Grušas, President of the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference. Thereafter, plans will be underway for the excursion.

Rev. Audrius Arštikaitis, the current Rector of the Pontifical Lithuanian College in Rome and the director of the Villa Lituania, was unable to participate in this year's National Convention, but sent a greeting and presented next year's project, which is the replacement of several small outdoor terraces/roofs. The replacement of the roofs and renovations of the terraces will cost \$30,800 USD. The Lithuanian's Bishops and Lithuanian and US benefactors contributed \$10,000 USD toward the renovations. He thanked the Knights for adopting the Pontifical Lithuanian College in Rome. The Knights of Lithuania organization has steadfastly and consistently supported the College's various projects throughout the years. He extended his blessings upon the Knights of Lithuania members and congratulated the organization on the occasion of its 107 years of existence.

President of the Knights of Lithuania Foundation Aldona Zajauskas reported about the last fiscal year. A resolution was passed to use the principal funds of the Foundation's assets to distribute for various worthy causes. Aldona Zajauskas announced that during the 2021-2022 fiscal year, donations will be made to Veronica Savatskaya, a 4-year-old girl from Šiauliai, Lithuania, who needs orthopedic surgery to be able to walk again, and to the Knights of Lithuania member Paul Strolia to remaster his father, musician/composer, and honorary member Faustas Strolia's music, songs, and hymns. A total of \$10,500 will be distributed. The essay contest was reinstated and there were two winners - Ronald and Mary Clare Voveris, C-143, Pittston, Pennsylvania, who will each receive \$100.



Robert A. Martin, Jr. read the Knights of Lithuania National President Regina Juška-Švoba's greeting



Convention participants



Convention participants

Elena Nakrosis, H.M. President of Our Lady of Šiluva Fund, one of the ancillary organizations of the Knights of Lithuania, gave an update of the activities since 2019. The history of Our Lady of Šiluva continues to be promoted on the official website [www.ourladyofšiluva.com](http://www.ourladyofšiluva.com). The history has been translated into the Polish and Spanish languages to promote further dissemination about Our Lady of Šiluva. Elena Nakrosis stated that she recently brought back specially-made candles from Šiluva, Lithuania. They are available for purchase. Also, there is “Our Lady of Šiluva Hymns to Mary” CD available for purchase. Since the Our Lady of Šiluva shrine, located at the National Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC, is celebrating its 55th anniversary of installation this year, a symbolic donation of \$5,500 will be made to the Basilica for the ongoing maintenance of the Our Lady of Šiluva Shrine. In closing, Elena Nakrosis thanked everyone for their continued support of the Our Lady of Šiluva fund.

Elena Nakrosis, H.M. President of the Knights of Lithuania Charities presented the 2021-2023 Charities officers: President Robert A. Martin, Jr. (St. Casimir’s Guild), Vice-President Alex Fletcher (Scholarship Fund), Secretary Aldona Zajauskas (Knights of Lithuania Foundation) and Board Member Elena Nakrosis (Our Lady of Šiluva Fund). The following will serve ex-officio: attorney Al Rimas Domanskis and National President Regina Juška-Švoba, HM. The identification of a Spiritual Advisor is pending.

The first plenary sessions closed with a prayer led by Dave Boucher, Presidium co-chair.

Lunch at the hotel followed. During the lunch a raffle of a variety of Lithuanian items as well as the newly released book by Ruta Lee and autographed by her, “Consider Your A\*\* Kissed,” were donated as winnings. In all, \$370 was collected to benefit the Knights of Lithuania Charities.

## Second Plenary Session

Presidium co-chair Michael Petkus started the second session with a prayer.

Georgianna Macke, HM, Ritual Committee chairperson, announced that one member, Alexandra (Lexie) Rudmin, C-16 Chicago, Illinois, has been approved to receive her 4th degree at the closing Mass of this convention.

Trustees Dave Boucher and Cathy Nakrosis reviewed the organization’s general treasury, the Knights of Lithuania Charities, St. Casimir’s Guild, the Knights of Lithuania Foundation, and Our Lady of Šiluva Fund financial records and found them to be in compliance. Unfortunately, they reported, no council or district has volunteered to host the 2022 108th National Convention. Therefore, the responsibility of hosting the 108th convention will fall upon the Supreme Council. The location

and exact dates will be announced in the near future.

National First Vice-President Alex Fletcher gave a comprehensive presentation of the results of the membership survey. At the direction of the Supreme Council, National President Regina Juška-Švoba, HM, prepared a letter and questionnaire. These were mailed to all members of the Knights of Lithuania in March 2021. The purpose of the survey was to poll the members about the future of the organization – how long they envision the organization existing given the declining numbers. At the time survey, the organization consisted of 857 members. 246 responses (28.7%) were received. Closure of organization is being considered/discussed due to: decline in members due to age, health, inactivity, deaths, varying degrees of council/district activity; fewer new members are joining; recruitment for National positions is challenging. Even prior to Covid-19, activities on local and district levels have decreased. Finances on the national level are not an issue. It was cited that the Knights of Lithuania organization is not alone in this situation. Many other social/fraternal/civic organizations also experience the same challenges. A majority of the respondents favor closure in the next 0-10 years (67%). 23% of the respondents wanted the Knights of Lithuania to continue on “in perpetuity, forever, indefinitely”. Of the overall response, a few members volunteered to assist in efforts in keeping the organization going. Suggestions that were made to keep the Knights of Lithuania alive and moving forward: increased membership drives, social media presence, and hiring of experts to determine methods of keeping the organization going. The New England District formed a subcommittee of seven members to provide input on the future of the Knights of Lithuania. They prepared and submitted a documented plan on actions to take to improve and grow the Knights of Lithuania. In the last 107 years of existence, the Knights of Lithuania accomplished much and is proud of helping Lithuanian immigrants assimilate into American life; keeping Lithuanian culture alive in the US during the Soviet occupation of Lithuania; rebuilding Lithuania after the fall of the Soviet Union; lobbying for NATO membership for Lithuania; significant and impressive charitable gift-giving through the organization’s ancillary groups (Aid to Lithuania, Inc., St. Casimir’s Guild, Knights of Lithuania Foundation, Scholarship Fund, Our Lady of Šiluva Fund); developing life-long friendships and relationships and enjoyable and fun times. Based on the survey, the Supreme Council feels that a five-year timeframe for dissolution seems prudent with the number of current membership levels and anticipated further decline. Long discussions ensued following the presentation with opinions favoring dissolving the organization and those keeping it going. A resolution was made to form a New Ideas Committee to be co-chaired by

Maria Deksnis, HM, and her daughter, Andreja Deksnis, both C-158, Michigan City, Indiana. They will form a committee of volunteer members, who will be independent of the Supreme Council. The committee will report its findings/suggestions/recommendations to delegates of the 108th National Convention in 2022.

Elections of the new 2021-2022 Supreme Council were held. Regina Juška-Švoba, Honorary Member, Council 102, Detroit, Michigan, was unanimously re-elected as president for a tenth year term to lead the Knights of Lithuania organization. Vice-President - Alex Fletcher, Secretary - Liza Macke, Treasurer - Debbie Martin Rudmin, Financial Secretary - Lexie Rudmin, Trustees - David Boucher and Cathy Nakrosis.

The Financial Review Committee announced that there were six requests for donations:

1. four (4) religious order congregations: Sisters of St. Casimir, Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, Sisters of the Jesus Crucified, Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God
2. Lithuanian press "Draugas" and "Draugas News"
3. JBANC
4. Our Lady of Šiluva Chapel at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC
5. IHO Cardinal Audrys Juozas Bačkis's 60th anniversary of priesthood ordination monthly Masses to be celebrated at the Pontifical College in Rome and repayment to the Knights of Lithuania Foundation for advance donation at the 2016 convention.

A total of \$33,150.00 was allotted for the donations. The financial review committee consisted of Debbie Martin Rudmin, National Treasurer; Dave Boucher and Cathy Nakrosis, Trustees; Elena Nakrosis, HM, Knights of Lithuania Foundation and representatives from the Amber District, Mid America District, and New England District.

Donations to various charities were collected during the convention. A total of \$1,750.00 was received and will be distributed to St. Casimir's Guild, Our Lady of Šiluva, and the Knights of Lithuania general fund.

The formal sessions were concluded with a prayer by Michael Petkus.

## Banquet

After every Knights of Lithuania National Convention completes the working sessions and elects a new Supreme Council for the next year, a celebratory banquet is held. The 107th National Convention was celebrated with a banquet too. This year the group was smaller due to the Covid-19 pandemic, travel restrictions, and those individuals who were leery of traveling during this time. The official convention photograph was taken prior to the banquet.



The banquet dinner tables were tastefully decorated in patriotic US colors

107th National Convention master of ceremonies for the evening convention, co-chair Robert A. Martin, Jr. HM, welcomed everyone and led in prayer before the meal. The banquet hall was tastefully decorated in patriotic US colors. Robert A. Martin, Jr. HM read the Knights of Lithuania National President Regina Juška-Švoba's, H. M. greeting thanking Convention co-chairs Robert A. Martin, Jr. HM and Lexie Rudmin and their committee for doing an outstanding job in organizing the 107th National Convention. She encouraged everyone to continue to dedicate and fully participate in the various celebrations and activities of the organization, as not many organizations with such longevity continue to be active and exist. We continue to exist because we are a multi-generational organization that has loyal, dedicated, committed, and talented members. And let us never forget our roots and heritage. As it was the 20th anniversary of the tragic events of 09/11/2001, the poem by Ronald Doe "When a Part of America Died." She also thanked the Knights of Lithuania members for re-electing her as president and entrusting her in this position.

The Scholarship Committee chair Alex Fletcher announced the 2021-2022 scholarship recipient winners. They were Elizabeth (Liza) Macke, C-157 Lemont, Illinois; Augustas Senuta, C-1, Brockton, Massachusetts; Regina Mikalauskas, C-96, Dayton, Ohio; and brothers Brian and Justin Johnson., C-19, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In all, \$16,000.00 will be awarded.

The official portion of the banquet program concluded with a prayer led by Robert A. Martin, Jr., HM.

Musical entertainment followed.



The "Portraits of Mary" series on the interior face of the doors of the basilica



Sunday, September 12, 2021

Prior to the celebration of the closing Mass, the fourth-degree candidate Lexie Rudmin gave her oath and received the 4th-degree medal and certificate. The Supreme Council elect gave their oath of office. The ceremonies occurred at the Mother and Child Chapel, adjacent to the Basilica of Mary, Queen of the Universe in Orlando, Florida.

The closing Mass was celebrated by Rector Rev. Robert E. Webster. The basilica's choir sang during the Mass.

Rev. R. Webster acknowledged and greeted the Knights of Lithuania organization. For this special closing Mass, they wore Lithuanian sashes.

Rev. Robert Webster told the history of the apparition of Our Lady of Šiluva in 1608 to the young children. He stated that the plaque has been displayed all weekend and during each Mass, Rev. R. Webster re-told the story of the apparition. It was a special occasion indeed as the bronze plaque with the image of Our Lady of Šiluva was blessed and dedicated. Rev. R. Webster informed the congregation that this is the first plaque that he had the honor to bless and dedicate since his assignment at the Basilica. He stated that the Our Lady of Šiluva bronze plaque will be permanently displayed in the Basilica of Mary, Queen of the Universe. The plaque is a part of the basilica's "Portraits of Mary" series, which surrounds the interior face of the doors of the basilica. The plaque was commissioned by the Knights of Lithuania organization with the financial support of the estate of Anne M. Jutt. The Mass concluded with the choir and organist singing composer/musician Faustas Strolia's, HM "Hymn to Our Lady of Šiluva." The music and singing of this hymn and the dedication of the plaque brought on many emotions to the Knights of Lithuania members. There was hardly a dry eye present. Even members of the congregation came to view and were photographed with the newly acquired plaque. Many asked the Knights of Lithuania members to elaborate on the history of Our Lady of Šiluva. Even a few churchgoers stated that, in their pilgrimage travels, they never heard of the apparition of Šiluva and now are interested in planning to visit the site in Lithuania. Our Lady

works in mysterious ways. Rev. Webster and the Knights of Lithuania members took photographs together with the new plaque. Knights of Lithuania member Marytė Bizinkauskas gifted Rev. Webster with a traditional Lithuanian sash. He humbly thanked Marytė and the Knights of Lithuania and said: "Now I feel like a Lithuanian!"

After the closing Mass, a farewell luncheon was held at the Embassy Suites Lake Buena Vista Hotel. After the luncheon, delegates and friends bid their farewells to one another and wished each other safe travels to their homes or next destination.

The 2021 National Convention was different from years past because it was conducted in person and via Zoom, and it was a new and historical experience for the organization. It was also an abbreviated convention. The sessions were productive and fruitful. It was good to see and nurture special friendships of members known for many years and establish new acquaintances and contacts. It was a special time of sharing and catching up. May this organization continues to live and work by our motto: "For God and Country - Dievui ir Tėvynei!" Valio, Vyčiai! Ilgiausių metų!

The 108th convention will be hosted by the Supreme Council. The location and dates will be announced in the near future.

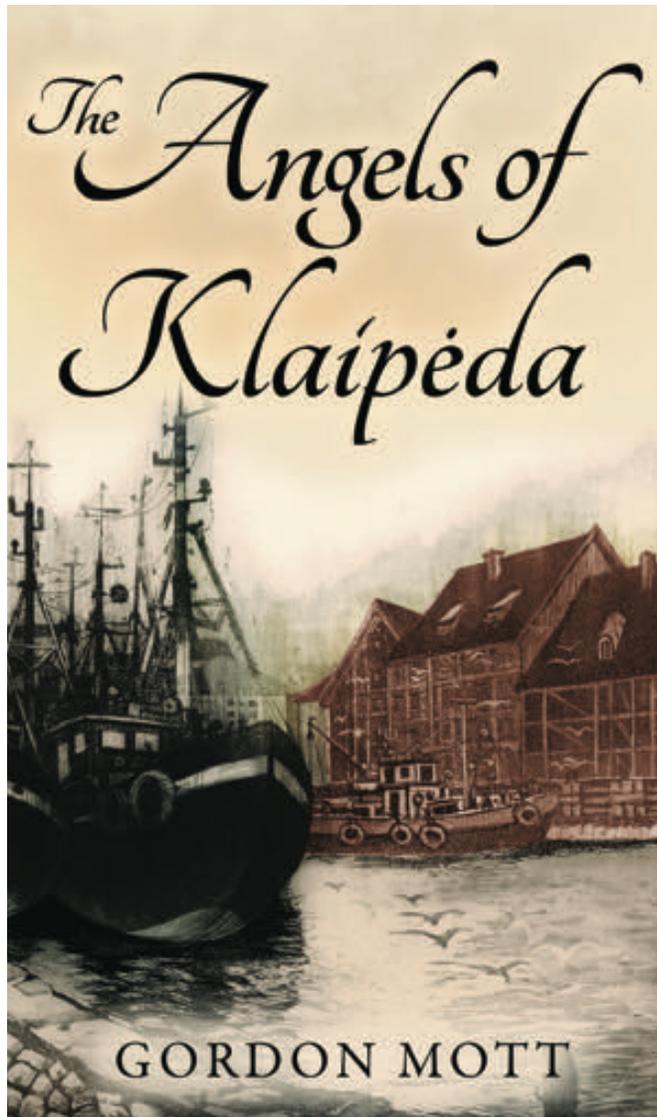


The bronze plaque with the image of Our Lady of Šiluva



Rev. Robert E. Webster blesses the bronze plaque with the image of Our Lady of Šiluva

## The Author of “Lithuanian Lullaby” Now Writes About Klaipėda, London, and Lebanon



Gordon Mott released a new book this summer called “The Angels of Klaipėda.” You may recall Bridges covered the release of his first novel earlier this year. “Lithuanian Lullaby” became an Amazon bestseller in its category. It was covered extensively by Lithuanian media like LRT, Lietuvos Rytas, and The Baltic Times. It was also featured in a post by the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania.

In his second book, much of the storyline occurs in Klaipėda in the late 90s. One of the characters, Tanja, returns to her native city from London after her husband,

George, dies during a taxi robbery in Beirut. However, there’s a twist. The report of his death is a miscommunication. In reality, George is being held hostage by a cell of Hezbollah.

Like his first book, the Lithuanian storyline is complemented by events outside the country. In “The Angels of Klaipėda,” the complex situation in Lebanon unfolds with part of the country occupied by Israeli Forces. The plotline revolves around a single attack by those forces on the Lebanese village of Kfour during the summer of 1997.

This real historical attack also destroys a fictional communications center, which houses the two Hezbollah officials who are familiar with George’s situation. The novel depicts intrigue, espionage, and a world of secrets, where information is only provided to those who ‘need to know’. The family who holds George is unaware that the man who could authorize his release is no longer alive. In the meantime, his Russo-Lithuanian wife, Tanja, tries to re-establish her life with her two small daughters and her Down syndrome brother in Klaipėda. She begins a peculiar relationship with a man who tutors her brother. Initially, from her perspective, it’s a relationship of convenience, but for him, he falls deeply in love. Things become very complicated when Tanja ‘accidentally’ becomes pregnant.

While his family moves on with a new life in Klaipėda, George’s mental state deteriorates in captivity. His one redeeming grace is an unusual friendship with the warden’s teenage daughter.

Eventually, that friendship leads to attempts by her to gain his release.

There is some irony in one of the subplots. The book was released before recent events, but one of the storylines features Afghanistan and involves Al Qaeda and the Taliban. It’s an Afghan who eventually negotiates George’s release.

The book focuses on the theme of ‘perspective’ with key characters interpreting events very differently. The Lebanese girl’s interpretation of the ongoing Israeli conflict is particularly interesting. Gordon also explores the concept of ‘Stockholm Syndrome’ with both main characters being beholden at times. There is also an interesting depiction of lingering Lithuanian mythology, with one of the supporting characters discussing dream analysis and the symbolism of storks and cloud formations. Those beliefs play an important role in the novel’s finale.

At the close of the book, a cliffhanger unfolds in Klaipėda. George returns to his family, but that family and the world have moved on without him. The ending is unexpected - and quite beautiful.

## Excerpt 1

"It hasn't been confirmed by the local authorities as far as I know." Darius decided to change gears; if he was going to deliver this message, it needed to be delivered without ambiguity, "I'm sorry Tanja, it looks like he's dead... I love him; I'm so sorry."

Tanja went quiet for a moment, and then her thoughts ran wild and then she felt overwhelmed with sadness and then with anger and then, in one instant, a tidal wave of emotions seemed to come at the same time - Tanja erupted on the platform at Stratford Station in East London. She collapsed and screeched so loudly that the entire busy station seemed to come to a complete standstill. People stared at the crazy woman as she collapsed to her knees and kept screeching in a foreign tongue as she declared, "No, no, why? Why God? Why me? Why him?" Tanja sobbed and sobbed; part of her wanted to throw that mobile phone onto the tracks for delivering this disgusting news. She was repulsed at it and felt a sense of rage toward it.

"Tanja?" said Darius quietly. "Tanja?"

She looked at the phone; she'd felt disgusted toward it, but not toward Darius; he was only providing her the news that no one else was able to give her. It was the truth, even if it were a repugnant truth.

She sobbed and tried to compose herself; she sniffled her reply, "I'm here."

"Can you get home and call me when you get there? I'll be on my mobile. I am so sorry; I love him; I love you too. We're going to get through this."

"I will," she replied.

She disconnected the call and stared at the trains passing her; she watched them come and go. She was past the outburst now; she was just numb and stood on that platform, her face stained with tears as she watched the trains come and go. People passed and looked at her. She didn't care; she was alone now; she was alone to fend for herself. As the next train arrived, she pushed the pram onto it and waited for the doors to close. She was returning home - to her apartment at Canary Wharf.

## Excerpt 2

It had been a long afternoon of meetings for Imad, but it was that morning meeting that he kept replaying in his mind. He wasn't aware of any British hostage - and he was aware of all hostages. He even knew the names of all of them - both Israeli and members of the South

Lebanon Army. He didn't necessarily know where they were all kept. It was possible that Lamia's father had misunderstood something or maybe he had told Lamia a fib to impress his teenage daughter. Lamia might well have an Israeli in that basement. He would order someone to investigate and report back to him.

Imad sat back in his chair and thought about it. It wasn't her words that bothered him so much, that could be a mix-up in communication between father and daughter. It was the timing that was compelling. There had been other odd things that had emanated from that period. It all revolved around a single date. A date that had been etched on Imad - August 4, 1997 - the attack at Kfour.

## Excerpt 3

As the plane began its descent, it dipped below the clouds and Tanja could see the miles of sandy beach which made up the Baltic Sea coast; she was going home; it was the beginning of a new life.

It was the first big decision she'd made since George's death. Come to think of it, it was the biggest decision that she'd ever made. Tanja was aware that there were people in Klaipėda who probably thought it was a joke; after all, she was giving up the comforts of the West to move her family to a third-world republic. However, Tanja thought differently. Not only would she get to be back home, but she reckoned that her pounds and dollars would go much further. She could likely live well and for the rest of her life on the money that George had saved and from the money from the insurer.

## Excerpt 4

Mantas nodded his head; he put on his coat and shoes and Tanja opened the door for him. While he began the descent down the stairs, he could hear Tanja locking the apartment door. As he heard the key turn in the lock, he felt like a lamb slowly making its way to slaughter. The fantasy that had somehow slipped into reality would now slip quietly back to where it began - a mere fantasy of that beautiful Tanja and that family that he had wanted to lead; now he would be removed completely from it. Mantas stood in the street while Tanja pulled the main door shut. It was time to accept the lecture.

"Mantas, let's walk a little; just over to the river; somewhere more private." It was an unwelcome comment; she wanted to do it in private; maybe she thought he would cry or make a scene; he wouldn't give her the satisfaction. In order to get to the river, they had to use a crosswalk, which crossed four lanes of moving traffic. Mantas was beyond frustrated, the cars were meant to stop, but this was Lithuania and they often didn't. He wanted to take his frustration out on one of those cars - maybe kick one

# book review

who refused to give way. When they finally arrived at the river walkway and got to the river, Tanja faced him; she leaned on a railing. She looked down at first then back up.

"Mantas – I'm not quite sure how to say this; I'm pregnant."

## Excerpt 5

"Tanja – I'm from a small village. The old people there had funny beliefs. They were very superstitious. If a stork nested near a home, it was good luck; it would bring new life. If a crop didn't do well, you'd displeased God and you needed to make amends before planting another crop. Old folks would watch the cloud formations to see if the universe was trying to send any signals. It may sound daft, but there's also some truth in those strange beliefs. When you thought that your husband was dead, you got involved with a man and then you didn't really want him in your life, but you were pregnant. Then, you had an accident and you loved him because he cared for you. Then, something happened and you put him on a 'time out.' During that break, your dead husband arrives from the grave - at the very time that you had him on that 'time

out.' If that is not a signal from the universe, I'm not sure what would be. Anyway, that's my advice; I didn't think you'd like it, but that's my advice.

Tanja thought to herself, 'Luce was absolutely right; I don't like that advice.'



Gordon Mott, author of "The Angels of Klaipėda"



## ANTANAS V. DUNDZILA MEMORIAL FUND FOR SOVIET OCCUPATION RESEARCH



The **Vydunas Youth Fund, Inc. (VYF)** is a not-for-profit organization, which supports various educational projects. In his will, Antanas V. Dundzila requested that part of his estate be donated to the VYF and used to establish a fund within the VYF to support research into and preservation of historical data related to the soviet occupation of Lithuania – especially:

- during the periods from 1940–1941 and from 1944–1990;
- documenting the harsh life and suffering of massive groups of forcefully deported Lithuanians forced to live in the Siberian gulags and;
- documenting the valiant efforts and armed resistance of the freedom fighters/partisans (partizanal) against the soviet occupiers during and after World War II.

Educational research centers and institutions, organizations, authors and others doing research and work related to the above-listed topics **are encouraged to create projects** addressing the listed subject matter.

Additional information can be found on the Vydunas Youth Fund, Inc. website:  
**w w w . V y d u n a s Y o u t h F u n d . o r g**

## Diana Nausėdienė, patron of Lithuanian education abroad, visited the Department of Lithuanian Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago

By Karilė Vaitkutė



First Lady of Lithuania Diana Nausėdienė and the University of Illinois in Chicago Chancellor Prof. Michael Amiridis

On September 23 and 24, 2021, President of the Republic of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda and First Lady Diana Nausėdienė visited Chicago, where they met with a large Lithuanian community and representatives of various organizations. Diana Nausėdienė, the patron of Lithuanian education abroad, devoted part of her day on Thursday to a meeting with the leadership of the University of Illinois at Chicago and with the faculty and students of the Department of Lithuanian Studies. First Lady was warmly welcomed by the University Chancellor, Prof. Michael Amiridis, the Vice-Chancellor and Provost Javier Reyes, the Vice-Chancellor for Health Affairs Robert Barish, the Vice Provost for Global Engagement Neal McCrillis, the Director of the School of Literatures, Cultural Studies and Linguistic Studies Prof. José A. Camacho, and the Head of the Department of Lithuanian Studies, Prof. Giedrius Subačius, as well as by the Lithuanian language lecturer Karilė Vaitkutė.

In her speech, Diana Nausėdienė expressed her delight in being able to visit one of the largest universities in the USA, one of the top 100 universities in the world. First

Lady noted that the University of Illinois in Chicago was of particular importance to Lithuania, as it has a Department of Lithuanian Studies. First Lady also asked the Chancellor if he knew that the University of Illinois at Chicago had helped to destroy the Soviet Union because the Lithuanian language education was one of the components that enabled Lithuanians living abroad to remain patriots of Lithuania, to continue the struggle for Lithuania's freedom, and to make sure that people in the US were constantly reminded of Lithuania, its history and culture.

As we know, the Department of Lithuanian Studies at the University of Illinois was established in 1984. Lithuanians from the USA and around the world raised \$600,000 for its establishment, presented it to the University of Illinois as a gift, and signed an agreement with the University to establish the Endowed Chair. This amount has now more than doubled. A portion of the incremental percentage is used for the needs of the Lithuanian Studies Department. In 1990, the agreement establishing the Chair was supplemented by the statement that the Chair would operate in perpetuity. In 1993, Prof. Kelertienė became the



Prof. Giedrius Subačius introduces the Lithuanian Studies Department and its publications to First Lady

Head of the Department (after Prof. Vaškėlis retired), and in 1994, Prof. Giedrius Subačius was employed. Before the closure of the Master's and Doctoral programs in 2007, the Department of Lithuanian Studies had the following Masters and Ph.D. students: Vita Storey, Alma Jakimavičiūtė, Julius Keleras, Jolanta Macevičiūtė, Karilė Vaitkutė, Danas Lapkus, Dalia Kučėnas, Jūra Avižienis, Rasa Kalinauskaitė, Eglė Ivinskienė, Aušra Veličkaitė, Neringa Klumbytė, Rūta Birštonaitė, Žydrūnas Drungilas, Kristina Sakalavičiūtė, Dalia Cidzikaitė, Elizabeth Novickas, Audra Savickaitė, Vladas Krivickas, Daiva Litvinskaitė, Aurelija Tamošiūnaitė. Dalia Kučėnas, Danas Lapkus, Dalia Cidzikaitė, Daiva Litvinskaitė and Aurelija Tamošiūnaitė. Four of them have written and published books based on their dissertations. Unfortunately, since the autumn semester of 2007, the new administration of the University of Illinois has closed the Department's Master and Doctoral programs.

First Lady expressed her hope that Lithuanian studies would continue to exist, providing the opportunity to study one of the world's oldest living Indo-European languages. The Lithuanian State currently contributes financially to the upkeep of the Department, and the University of Illinois at Chicago provides premises for the Lithuanian Studies Department and classrooms for students.

After the meeting with the university authorities, D. Nausėdienė visited the Department of Lithuanian Studies. Prof. Subačius briefed the First Lady on the activities of the Department, showed her the publications to which the Department has contributed - the journals *Metmenys*, *Lituanus* and *Archivum Lithuanicum*, books published by Ph.D. students, and the Department's own books - *Experts of the Lithuanian Language in the Service of the Russian Empire*, Upton Sinclair's *Lithuanian Jungle*, and *The Riga Orthography* of Simonas Daukantas. First Lady took a sincere interest in Professor Subačius's activities and wrote in the guest book of the department, " Prof. Giedrius Subačius, the Knight, Researcher, Defender, Preserver, and Creator of the Lithuanian word, and the community of the University of Illinois Department of Lithuanian Studies. Best wishes for growing together with Lithuania! Diana Nausėdienė. Chicago. 09.23.2021."

Later, the First Lady interacted with the students of the Lithuanian Language and Culture program and members of the University of Illinois Lithuanian Student Association. The students had a very lively conversation with Mrs. Nausėdienė, talking about their studies, their life, and their experiences during their visit to Lithuania. Many of them expressed their desire to go to Lithuania to study, intern, or work there. Mrs. Nausėdienė's visit to the University of Illinois was important in order to maintain the focus on Lithuanian studies. In 2024 the Department will celebrate its 40th anniversary. We hope that the Department will live and thrive for many years to come.



First Lady of Lithuania Diana Nausėdienė meets the students

# President Gitanas Nausėda and First Lady met with the Lithuanian American Community

All photos by Sandra Ščedrina

President Nausėda's meeting with the Lithuanian American community was an excellent opportunity to mark the 70th anniversary of the activities of the Lithuanian American community in the U.S and to celebrate their contribution for Lithuania's statehood – its restoration and preservation.

"You are a hearth of Lithuanian culture in the United States and a role model to the entire Lithuanian diaspora in the world. It is insufficient to say that your contribution is significant. Your support in difficult historical times was not only politically important, but also giving us hope and moral strength," the President said.

According to him, the Lithuanian community in America has always been distinguished by strong and particularly active organizations. The President noted the long-standing efforts made by Lithuanian Americans in representing Lithuania's political and economic interests in the U.S. and around the world.



President Gitanas Nausėda and First Lady Diana Nausėdienė were warmly greeted by Lithuanian Americans



At the Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis Lithuanian Catholic Mission in Lemont



Paying respects at the Monument to the Mother of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters



With the students of Lithuanian Montessori School

# UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

## Memoir of a Siberian Deportee

By Juzė Avižienytė Žukauskienė

Translated from the Lithuanian by Giedrė Kumpikas, Ph.D., niece of the author, and Isabel Kumpikas, sister of the author



Siberian Sky. Photograph by Rolandas Žygas

### 24. I FIGHT

*(Continued from the September 2021 issue)*

I explained to him that his health was poor, that he was a war veteran who had lost 50% of his work capacity, and that in Lithuania, he was receiving a pension.

He listened attentively without anger, without mockery, not like the agents and the commandant. I felt a sense of humanity in him as well as sympathy.

My shivering from the cold stopped, I warmed up, my hands became hot, my cheeks were flaming. Finally, the chairman nodded his head and said:

"What fools they are, we need money and they send me a human being..." and to me in the words of Christ:

"Go in peace, woman."

"But where can I go at night? You know that it's 24 km through the taiga to Sviatlo-Zelionoe, and no one lives in between. Where shall I go?"

"Why to the taiga? Ask someone here to take you in for the night, and, in the morning, you'll stop by the office and I will have prepared an answer for them. You'll take it back."

From the comforting warmth and light, I stepped out into the icy Siberian night. The cold was even sharper. My face felt as if it had been swept by a flame. In the windows of the chatas small beams of light were flickering. I knocked on one door. In the chata, a man was sitting, and around the table, a group of small children was doing their homework, in a crib, one more was kicking, while the woman was busy by the stove. I told them why I had come.

"It's very crowded by us. And the little one won't let you sleep peacefully.

Go there, the fourth chata from us, on the left, there lives a single woman with only a small daughter. They have no deportees. She will probably take you in," the people told me kindly.

I went there. I found a young woman with a little girl of about ten. I asked for lodging for the night.

"Fine, fine! You can sleep here. We have enough room,"

she began asking who I was, from where, how I wound up at Vysokoyar.

I told her everything openly, who I was, from where."

"Get undressed, get undressed. I'll get supper ready."

I was very hungry, but, knowing the price of food here, I was afraid I would not be able to repay her in any way.

"Don't worry, don't worry! Eat! My potatoes grew well this year. There's plenty," she placed before me a bowl of hot potatoes and also a cup of milk.

I greedily ate the steaming potatoes, drank the milk, and felt very happy that I had not been sent to prison, that I had not been insulted, that tomorrow I could go back to my family, which was obviously very worried about my fate now.

If they only knew how well I was doing!

In the morning, I thanked that good-hearted woman for the lodging and the food and left. On the way to the office, I met a couple of Lithuanian workers. They started asking eagerly how we were living in Komarovka. I more or less told her how we Lithuanians were faring there and I added:

"We are living in the taiga and freezing. We have no saw, no ax, we cannot get any wood."

"We are working at the MTS. We'll 'arrange' something. Watch:

I'm going to the outhouse and as soon as I come out, you go in. You'll find a saw..."

When I found the saw, I wrapped it around myself under my coat, tied the handles together with a handkerchief, and, having picked up a packet at the office, as if nothing had happened, started off for home.

There were no bounds to my joy. It was still early morning. The snow, as if angry, was grinding under my feet. The taiga was still. The cedars and pines from the weight of the hoar-frost on their branches seemed to be sleeping.

I hurried as fast as my legs could carry me. But having come more than 20 km the night before, and having rested little, my legs did not carry me very fast. I reached Svetlo-Zelionoe quite a bit after dark. Again, staying overnight and the next day, 'home' and my beloved husband and sons.

How happy they were, how they kissed me, and how much worry, even tears, there had been those two days.

After thawing my legs out in some hot water, and having a bite to eat, I fell into bed and slept. I did not go to work that day. When I went back to the office on the following day, my girls Tania and Talia eagerly began to ask me how everything had gone there. I related my journey with restraint.

"The commandant was overjoyed here. He said he will send you to the taiga to bring down trees, now he'll know."

Everything went back to its usual routine.

\* kopek - a Russian cent, 1/100th of a Ruble

\* Thee, Thou - In Russian, the formal-polite form "You" is used to address adults, officials and strangers; the informal - Thee, Thou - are used to address family members, some relatives, close acquaintances, children, and animals.

## 25. MOBILIZATION

The news came from the Front, that the Germans were pushing further east and were nearing Stalingrad. The newspapers wrote that the Germans had been defeated near Moscow, that they, like the French in 1812, were falling not only from bullets and cannonballs, but from the cold. That the Germans were disadvantaged by the cold, we believed, but that there had been such a huge Soviet upset, we did not.

All sorts of rumors were spreading, since almost no one got newspapers, and even those who did, did not really believe them.

In the mornings, when I went to work past the chicken coops, an unusual 'singing' of the chickens was heard. The poor things were very hungry in the cold barn, not being able to stand the pain in their bones from the stinging cold, would 'sing' - croaked in terrifying sounds. In the morning, the chicken coop attendant carried out a few that had frozen.

"Oh, this bodes nothing good, nothing good..." nodded the superstitious people.

Our former landlady was not from the former "rich people," who had been driven here from the Altai - she had come here from a free village through marriage. Her oldest son, Fyodor, a 20-year old, having heard that the chickens are 'singing,' immediately ran to the coop, grabbed the 'singer' and having brought it back, threw it into the burning stove. I let out a scream. The little chicken kicked around in the flames and collapsed on the embers.

"I'll teach you to 'sing!' scornfully said the young man, pulling the dead chicken with singed wings out of the stove. And at the same time, from behind the wall, one could hear again:

"Koo-ha-ha!"

"Oh, Fedya, you killed the wrong one, the little black one is singing," sighed the landlady.

"I brought the little black one," said Fedya in a crestfallen voice.

"This is the dark striped one. Probably the Evil One got mixed up in it...Oh, there is no escape from misfortune..." she was frightened herself and was instilling fear into the children.

But they did not kill the 'little black one.'

Well, they say don't believe in superstitions! After a

few days, Fedya received a notification to appear - a draft notice.

When the Germans failed to take Moscow, they energetically attacked on the southern Front. Everywhere, many soldiers perished. Again, every day, the war machine, especially at Stalingrad, ate up thousands of soldiers. The order came to mobilize even the men deported from the Altai.

I couldn't stand it and asked bitingly:

"Well, Citizen Commandant, even "the scum" is suitable? You said at one time that you will manage without "scum," but, apparently, the government has a different opinion!"

He did not take it and retorted angrily:

"Do your work, and don't stick your nose where it doesn't belong."

My girls leaned down even closer to the table.

"Thank you for the remark," I answered as angrily as he and began to click away on the abacus.

In the village, there were tears, lamenting, preparation. To the families from which the men were being taken, were issued 5 kg of flour for bread, since it was 300 km to Tomsk, and they had to march on foot. To the Regional Center, which was 26 km away, the mobilized men, on foot, were accompanied by the commandant and the chairman of the collective farm, in horse-drawn wagons. In the kolkhoz remained only women, children, old people, one or two men who were invalids, and the new arrivals.

## 26. NEW MISFORTUNES

It was difficult to manage. It was especially difficult to bring out the hay for the animals from the deep snow, (about 60 cm normal layer and in places 1-1 1/2 meters deep), which was piled up in the taiga quite a few kilometers away.

Much strength and experience were necessary.

Due to the lack of hay, the animals began to die.

In the office, we would receive two or three reprimands on account of the dead horses and cattle. By March, we had received 72 reprimands! It was awful!... The horses were necessary in the center of the collective farm, and the cows, which did not give milk in the winter, it was decided to bring them 15 km deeper into the taiga, where there was a lot of hay piled up. Michich, from whom we had bought the chata, was living there.

In addition, a guard-feeder was also sent there, an old man who could barely move.

The withered, skinny cows had very little strength to plod through the snow which reached higher than their sides. Having spent their last strength, they would fall into the snow.

The attendants would beat them and used other means to force them to get up, but they were already indifferent to everything. They died.

The attendant would cut the throat with a knife and continue his way with the remaining ones. The ones who had fallen were later placed on sleds and brought to the center of the collective farm. There, they would sell the meat to "the more deserving ones" (not the hungrier ones). Of course, those people would buy who had "played up to" the chairman and the warehouseman.

A few times even I was issued 5 kg of that carcass meat. On account of that, my husband almost lost his life once. It happened as follows: At the office, we received a statement, that one more cow which had been brought under Michich's care had died and that meat was being sold. I was issued 10 kg. What a stroke of luck! I immediately dashed home and told my husband. I handed him the paid receipt and he set out early in the morning.

In the taiga, where the road is already well-traveled, - there is a guarantee that one will not lose one's way because there are no other roads, - to go and return 15 km in one day (in the North, the day is short), is almost impossible. But hunger is a powerful drover.

"Don't be afraid, my dear, don't worry, I'll make it," said my husband in a determined fashion and, taking a sack, went out. I was worried. To go and come back in the snowdrifts of the taiga takes no less than ten hours.

Besides that, one needs to rest at least an hour on the farm and warm up, because one cannot sit down in the snow, nor stop, - if you stop to rest, you can freeze to death.

He went out at seven o'clock in the morning, that is, three hours before dawn, and at four o'clock in the afternoon, it is dark again. But Siberian nights are light, besides there was moonlight. In the summer, it is dangerous, you can meet a bear or step on a snake, but in the winter, they sleep. There are no wolves here at all, - the snow is too deep.

I was expecting my husband to be back by seven or eight o'clock in the evening. At about this time, I left the office to have supper. I found the children getting ready to light the stove and a pot filled with water placed on it. We are waiting for the father. He will bring home some meat, we will boil potato soup which will smell of meat.

This will be a great and rare feast.

But our dreams quickly fell apart:

a boy came running from the office and, without even closing the door, shouted:

"Auntie, they brought your old uncle back frozen!"

I felt my hands and legs go numb. The children began to cry and started to get dressed to go with me. I forbade them strictly and told them to wait at home, while I hurried to the office.

When I ran in, I already saw a whole crowd of people in the waiting room, and my husband, lying on a bench, stiff. He was still alive and was groaning painfully. If anyone tried to touch him, he cried out frightfully from pain. Paying no attention to his cries, I pulled off his felt boots, which were full of snow. Someone brought snow and the experienced native Siberians began to rub his feet with it. The sick man screamed with an inhuman voice. On the chairman's orders, someone brought a harnessed sled to bring him to the hospital.

But I did not consent. I asked them to take him home and with the horse, to go bring the doctor.

We brought him into the chata, laid him on the plank-bed. His legs and hands were like dried sticks, his joints did not bend. Ignoring his screams, his groans through his clenched teeth, we took off his clothes. They immediately brought denatured alcohol. I began to rub his whole body with it, to massage him with brushes.

His screams and groans subsided, his joints relaxed, his hands and legs got back their natural color. We gave him hot raspberry tea with alcohol to drink.

The sick man fell asleep. The people, gathered around the door, dispersed

His trip ended with a very serious form of pneumonia. My good, dear doctor Šakenienė and the Estonian doctor's assistant Paukson, did not spare their efforts to save him from death. It was quite far for both of them to come and the cold was holding steadily at about -45 C and less. But paying attention to nothing and without any pay, they visited every day and did everything their force and possibilities allowed them.

And thus, our dear provider lay coughing heavily, while our food reserves were getting smaller and smaller. While he was healthy, he would run over to the camp of the free people and there would exchange something for food.

When he began to get better, he told us what had happened on that disastrous march.

"On the way there, I walked quickly, hope was carrying me along, that we would have a little bit of meat for a long time (10 kg for five people), even though I knew that I would most probably only get bones and membranes of a lean, starving cow rather than meat; but even that was some sort of food.

When I got to the farm, I presented my receipt. But, the guard, who was also the warehouseman, began to curse:

'What the devil, why are they sending all kinds of people here. Mat, Mat!

"There is no meat, I gave everything out. Get out of my sight!"

Of course, this shocked me. I still tried to talk to him, that if not 10 kg then perhaps he could give me at least some. But the answer again was: 'Your mother...!' I left

there very upset, tired, and hungry. It was dark. I was plodding and plodding through the snow, and I felt that my legs were no longer obeying me, my hands were freezing, somehow stiffened, my joints not flexible.

I had a great desire to sit down.

But I knew that once I sit down, I will not get up. I began to call upon God. I called your names out loud. And again, gathering my forces, I plod through the gloomy taiga, through the deep snow, closer to home. I came up to the tracks where hay had been transported. I rejoiced that the road would be easier now and that at least I would not get lost, even though in the moonlight, everything looks different. I found a fallen heap of hay. But again, I was afraid to sit down. With stiffened hands, I lit a match and set fire to the hay.

My stiffening hands and my face warmed up. But there was not much hay, and it did not burn long. I plodded further. I began to stop more frequently, leaning my chest against my stick. Finally, through the thinning taiga, I saw the lights of the village.

Hope! Perhaps I'll reach it! But suddenly, as if a paralysis immobilized my muscles and, I felt, that I cannot take another step. It was difficult to hold my balance. I felt that I was about to fall and that I would never again see my beloved faces...

I was overcome with fright. I began to shout as loud as my voice would carry.

No one answered. I started to call God's name. How terrible to die here alone, when help and my dear ones are so close...and the next thing I know, I woke up in the chata, I saw your face bending over me and... a terrible pain in my whole body. If it hadn't been for the pain, I would have thought it was a hallucination before dying."

And he was saved from death by that same Zhukov, who had informed against me to the commandant. He recounted:

"It was moonlight. Rabbits were running around. I had placed traps on their paths. I went at night to check them. I thought I heard someone shouting for help. I wondered who could be calling for help not far from the settlement? I listened again. And once more a call in the name of God. I understood that help was really needed, and I set out in that direction. I see that a man is lying on the hay road. I ran up and tried to help him stand up, but he screamed! It even scared me. I tried to put him over my shoulder. And again, that painful screaming. Then I tied together my skis (the branches of the wood of the taiga are very wide, about 30 cm, and sewed around with elk fur) and I put Liudas Andreyevitch on them and, whether he screamed or not, whether he groaned or not, I headed for the village."

# current events

## Security

...In response to Lithuania allowing Taiwan to open a de facto embassy in Vilnius, China has recalled its ambassador and has expelled the Lithuanian ambassador in Beijing. The new representation office in Vilnius will open with the name "Taiwan" rather than the ambiguous "Taipei," which is used for unofficial missions in the 57 countries where it has no formal diplomatic relations, including the United States. Hu Xijin, who leads the Chinese Communist Party tabloid, the Global Times, an associated website on Weibo, China's main social media service, editorialized: "Lithuania is a crazy, tiny country full of geopolitical fears." He went on to add: "It is rare to see small countries like Lithuania that specifically seek to worsen relations with major powers." Taiwan has 23 offices in Europe, and only one of which – the Holy See (the central government of the Catholic Church) is an embassy under its formal name, the Republic of China. China has halted rail freight to Lithuania and reportedly halted export permits for agriculture, timber, animal husbandry, and Lithuanian beer. Although Beijing considers Taiwan a province of China, the Chinese Communist Party has never governed Taiwan, which is the final stronghold of the retreating Nationalist troops as they escaped to Taiwan (or Formosa per the Portuguese) from mainland China in 1949. China cut diplomatic contact with Taiwan after the 2016 election of President Tsai Ing-wen, who rejects Beijing's position that Taiwan is part of 'one China' but holds the position that Taiwan is a de facto sovereign state.



...The joint military Three Swords-2021 exercises were held in the Lviv region of western Ukraine with 1200 soldiers from Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, and the United States plus 200 combat vehicles. Ukraine claims that at least 14,000 people have been killed in the conflict in eastern Ukraine since 2014. The President of Ukraine,

Volodymyr Zelensky desperately wants to implement a Membership Action Plan to join NATO and gather collective protection. There has been a policy of not expanding NATO where there is an active warzone.

...The three Baltic nations have joined together to purchase 11.7 million euros worth of explosive charges over seven years. This procurement includes demolition charges, culvert charges, signal charges, anti-personnel charges, and defense charges against heavy forces. Suppliers include Estonian company Eesti Arsenal OU and two German companies, Rheinmetall Waffe Munition GmbH and WesCom Signal & Rescue Germany GmbH.

...Lithuanian border guards reported that a dozen Belarusian officers in riot gear entered Lithuanian territory as they pushed a group of 35 Iraqi migrants into Lithuanian territory. They retreated after being told repeatedly that they had violated the border.

...Belarus rescinded permission for U.S. Ambassador Julie Fisher to take up residence in Minsk and ordered the U.S. to cut its staff to five diplomats. This action was in retaliation to the U.S. placing sanctions on a giant Belarus potash producer, the Belarusian National Olympic Committee, and 15 private companies with ties to Belarusian authorities.

...The families of 14 Afghan interpreters who worked with Lithuanian troops in Afghanistan arrived in Rautronis in western Lithuania. The group of 50 includes 14 minors and one infant. Overall, 115 interpreters had contracts with the Lithuanian army in Afghanistan as part of the NATO presence.

...LiTak-Tak, a Ukrainian developer of Lithuania's air defense system, plans to bring a 140 million euro arbitration claim against the Lithuanian government because it named the company, indirectly owned by Valeriy Boguslavskiy and Sergiy Perevaroy, as not meeting national security interests per a special commission vetting strategic deals. The setback resulted in the layoff of a third of its 48 employees. The claim has been approved by the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court, and LiTak-Tak plans to take it to the Washington-based International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes.

## Covid-19

...As an anti-mandatory vaccination and anti-vaccine passport demonstration swelled from a few hundred to 5,000, it turned into a riot in front of the Seimas in Vilnius.

Protesters threw rocks and bottles at police and injured one. Police used tear gas to disperse the crowd. A similar demonstration occurred in Latvia but without serious violence. There are plans to mark a 75-meter boundary around public institutions to protect against the unlawful occupation.

...At least 69.7% of the adult population in Lithuania has received at least one Covid-19 jab.

Lithuania plans to offer Covid-19 booster jabs to the entire population, with the elderly and vulnerable groups being the first priority. Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė said the booster would be entirely voluntary and came after an advisory panel cited studies that showed a decline in antibodies in those who were first vaccinated earlier this year.

...The European Union Recovery Fund for Covid-19 has allocated 2.22 billion euros to Lithuania from 2021 to 2026. The first tranche of 289 million euros was recently received to facilitate Lithuania becoming more "green" and digitized while recovering from the pandemic. The funds will be used for the installation of 200 MW energy batteries, the so-called millennium school program, and the development of digital innovations in education, as well as to expand the Innovation Fund's financial instruments focused on startup programs. Future disbursements are projected to be 435 million euros in 2022; 609 million in 2023; 624 million in 2024; 293 in 2025 and 114 million in 2026.

### Business

...Domino's, the largest pizza company in the world, plans on opening its first stores in Lithuania. Master franchisee, Morgacita Limited, has selected Vilnius sites in the Rimi Market and Ateities Street with more to follow in the next three years. Employment is expected to reach 400 jobs. Domino's has 18,000 stores in 90 markets. In 2020 sales reached \$16.1 billion with \$8.3 in the U.S. and \$7.8 billion internationally.

...The Swedish firm, Favro, will move its marketing, sales, customer service, and account management operations to Vilnius in September 2021. It has attracted more than 8 million euros in investments from venture capital firms such as Creandum, which invested with Spotify, iZettle, and Kry. With more than 1500 customers, the game-creator includes customers such as Walt Disney, X-Box, Unity, and SAP. Founded in 2016, it currently employs 26 people.

...The Norwegian electronic identity solutions provider Signicat acquired the Lithuanian startup Dokobit as an e-signing solutions provider. According to the Financial Times, Signicat is one of the fastest-growing European companies. Its revenue grew from 24 million euros in 2019 to 42 million euros in 2020. It has customers such as DNB, Rabobank, Santander, and Western Union. Signicat has offices in Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Both Signicat and Dokobit are among the few companies that are on the European Union's Trusted List of Qualified Trust Service Providers.

...The Italian cybersecurity firm, HWG, plans to open a Security Operations Center (SOC) in Vilnius this year and expects to hire about 20 cybersecurity analysts to work with clients around the world. Founded in Italy in 2008 and employing 60 senior cybersecurity analysts, it started working with central banks and works in 20 countries with SOCs in Verona, Dubai, and Singapore and soon to add Vilnius. The Vilnius office plans to expand its commercial presence in the Baltics, the Nordics, Belarus, and Poland. With the completion of the Kaunas-Palemonas section of the Rail Baltic line, standard gauge (1435 mm) freight trains have begun serving the Kaunas International Terminal. A 2 km dual 1435/1520 mm-gauge line was built in the Kaunas tunnel, 3.6 km of 1520 mm-gauge (Russian) track was reconstructed, and 9 km of new 1435 mm gauge track was laid. The European Union Structural Fund provided 85% of the funding in support of the goal that all freight moving more than 300 km be carried by ship or rail, with roads covering the last mile to reduce long-haul truck traffic and associated CO2 emissions.

...The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is lending 67.5 million euros to support the renovation of residential multi-apartment privately owned buildings. The ultimate source of the loan is the Lithuanian Ministry of Finance. Lithuania has about 38,000 apartment buildings, housing 66% of the population, with 35,000 built during the Soviet era with high energy consumption. Only about 4% (1,400) have been upgraded. This effort follows a 50 million euro loan program in 2017 which contributed to an average reduction in energy use in apartment buildings of 62% for homeowners' associations. The EBRD is a major investor in Lithuania with more than 100 projects worth more than one billion euros, with 73% in the private sector.

...The Lithuanian government has approved Ministry of Energy proposals for a 700 MW offshore wind auction, scheduled for 2023. The winners of the tender will have

# current events

the responsibility for building a wind farm and for connection to the onshore grid. The Lithuanian deputy Minister of Energy Daiva Garbaliuskaitė said, "Lithuania is still an importer of electricity, so the 700 MW offshore wind power project will provide its own and green electricity, which will cover up to a quarter of the country's total demand."

## General

...Lithuania's participation in the Tokyo Olympics included 42 athletes who met the entry standards in 12 sports. The only medal winner was Laura Asadauskaitė. She earned a silver in women's modern pentathlon, which combines fencing, swimming, laser-shooting, running, and equestrian events. At 37, she is the oldest medalist in the sport's history, which goes back to 2000. She took the gold in London in 2012. This year, Great Britain's Kate French took gold, and Hungary's Sarolta Kovacs took bronze.

...Within 10 days, at least 16 men and women, ages between 30 and 60 years, have died in Kaunas, and 2 others are hospitalized after drinking homemade alcohol. The drinks included the poisonous methyl alcohol, which is difficult to distinguish from ethyl alcohol. The Kaunas Regional Prosecutor's Office said that 17 pre-trial investigations have been launched, and one female suspect has been detained. Another person was also suspected of illegal distribution but he died of alcohol poisoning.

...Excavation by the Israeli Antiquities Authority at the Great Synagogue of Vilnius announced that they had found the bimah or raised platform and the remains of the Torah ark. The synagogue was built in 1633 on the site of an older synagogue. It was burnt by the Nazis, and the remains were flattened by the Soviets in the 1950s. A kindergarten was built on top of it.



...Statistics Lithuania reports that unemployment went from 8.3% in the second quarter of 2020 to 7.4% in the second quarter of 2021. During the first half of 2021, the Lithuanian population decreased by 12,000 due to a decrease of births by 16% to about 11,000 and an increase in deaths by 16% to about 24,000. This year, the decrease was due to natural causes and Covid-19 (3,320) rather than emigration.

# bridges

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October 2021

## The Lithuanian American Community is awarded the Golden Vytis!

Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis awarded the Lithuanian American Community with the Honorary Badge of Merit "For the Merits of Lithuanians of the World to Lithuania" for its long-standing unity of Lithuanians in the USA, support of Lithuania's quest for freedom during the occupation, contribution to the establishment of an independent Lithuania, promotion of the Lithuania-USA strategic partnership, the young generation's national education, and the promotion of civic citizenship.

Medals of Honour for special merits in fostering Lithuanian identity and contributing to the establishment of an independent Lithuania were also awarded to Alexander Rimas Domanskis, an active member of the Chicago Lithuanian community, Arvidas Kazimieras Jarašius, a member of the Board of Directors of the Lithuanian Community of Colorado and former long-time LAC chairman, founder and president of the Chicago Lithuanian Basketball League coach Aurimas Matulevičius, Laima Maria Michailovič, President of the Lithuanian Alliance in America, Darius Polikaitis, artistic director and conductor of the Chicago Lithuanian art ensemble "Dainava", Austėja Sruoga, member of the Lithuanian American Community Council, promoter of Lithuanian culture, and Robert A. Vitas, Founder and Chairman of the Council of the Centre for Lithuanian Studies and Research, Chairman of the Council of the Lithuanian Art Museum.



