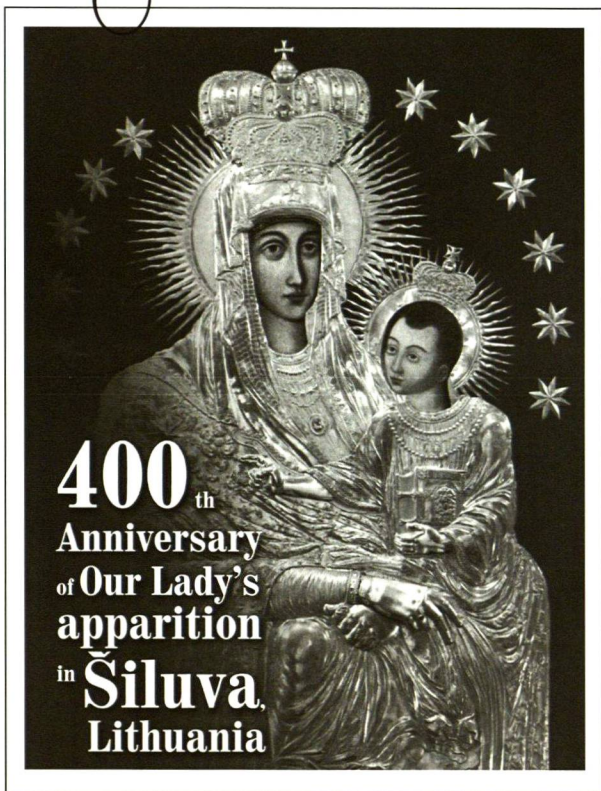


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september 2008

LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

Letter from the Editor

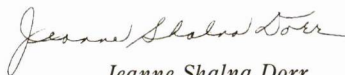
I can't believe that with this issue I am ending my fourth year as editor of Bridges. It seems I have been connected to Bridges for so long that I can't remember a time "B.B." or "before Bridges" since I started writing on a monthly basis almost twenty years ago.

The greatest gift I have received as editor has been the opportunity of "meeting" so many fantastic writers and wonderful readers albeit through the mail or the computer. I feel we are all part of a large Bridges "family." Gema has done a fantastic job as art director and production manager and the number of hours she puts into each issue is unbelievable. We receive many compliments on her art work which shows how much the hours and hours she works is so much appreciated.

It seems when I wrote "Mama and Her Aprons" in May I opened the flood gates to many people's memories and this month two of our steady contributors are sharing their memories with us. Gloria O'Brien, who translates the Folk Tales, takes us back to the days she grew up in New York. She really jogged my memory and I know other readers will have a smile on their faces, with the things she mentioned; among them the merchant with the silk stockings and the man who made his living from sharpening scissors and knives.

Ed Shakalis, who brings us the Trivia Question (and thank goodness the answer) belongs to the generation that has been dubbed "the greatest generation" and he has graciously shared one of his World War II experiences. From time to time you will read more of his experiences. Many Americans of Lithuanian descent served in the Armed Forces during the war and they deserve to be remembered.

Thanks for sharing your home with us this month!



Jeanne Shalna Dorr



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HOMECOMING LITHUANIANS.**

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*Cover: Photo by Ina Petokas of the "Šiluvos Marija" poster that was designed by Sigitas Sniras for the Los Angeles celebration.

The Lithuanian Community Of Los Angeles Expresses Its Devotion To Our Lady Of Šiluva



Flag procession of organizations "Šauliai, Atėitininkai and Skautai"

Photo by Ina Petokas

In the year 1608 children were tending their sheep in a field in the outskirts of the small town of *Šiluva*, Lithuania, when they saw a beautiful young woman on a rock, holding a baby in her arms and weeping bitterly. She did not speak, as tears ran down her cheeks. When news of this apparition spread throughout the town, the Calvinist pastor accompanied the children and was blessed with the same image. He asked the woman: "Why are you weeping?" In a sorrowful voice she replied: "There was a time when my beloved Son was worshipped by my people on this very spot. But now they have given this sacred soil over to the plowman and tiller and to the animals for grazing." Having uttered these words, the lady vanished, leaving those present with the conviction that they had just witnessed an apparition of Our Lady. 400 years later, in the year 2008, the

Lithuanians throughout the world mark the jubilee of these apparitions, thought to be the oldest in Europe.

The Lithuanian community of Los Angeles, with St. Casimir's Parish as its hub, celebrated this event in a solemn, joyful, resplendent manner on May 4, 2008 with solemn Mass at Our Lady of the Angels Cathedral in downtown Los Angeles. The event was the culmination of a year's preparation for

this occasion. When Bishop Ivanauskas visited Los Angeles more than a year ago, he suggested that the community start preparing for this world-wide event. He stressed that the preparation should include a spiritual renewal of the faithful and a continued devotion to Our Lady. An organizing committee of 25 members was formed, consisting of representatives from the various Lithuanian organizations and church



Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius SJ from Kaunas, Lietuva, reading in Lithuanian during the Mass.

Photo by Mindaugas Petokas

ministries. Meetings were held monthly to accomplish all the goals that were set. The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels is the architecturally innovative place of worship designed by the renowned Spanish architect R. Moneo. Since its opening five years ago, it has served as a point of controversy as well as communion for the faithful of Los Angeles. It was decided that the *Šiluva* celebration should take place there, since the Lithuanians had some input during the design process: The interior Communion of Saints tapestries include St. Casimir and Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis; on the rim of the entrance fountain, amongst the various languages one finds the words, "*Tau duosiu gyvojo vandens*" - "I will give you living water." This was the perfect place and a wonderful opportunity to highlight the Lithuanian culture and the fervent devotion of the Lithuanians of the greater Los Angeles area and environs. The year-long spiritual renewal program of the parish begun a year ago, continues to this day. Special lectures were organized, guest speakers invited, small groups met in private homes and followed the "Renew" program that is



Msgr. Edmundas Putrimas concelebrates the Mass, delivering part of the Mass in English. In back of Msgr. Putrimas second concelebrant of the Mass is Rev. Tomas Karanauskas, administrator of Šv. Kazimiero Lithuanian parish in LA

Photo by Mindaugas Petokas

widespread among American parishes and is available in Lithuanian. The living Rosary was organized, including about 200 faithful who promised to say a decade each day. In this way countless rosaries were offered to the Blessed Mother continuously every day. Teachers of the Saturday School taught the students about Our Lady's apparitions. They, in turn, drew pictures, wrote essays, memorized hymns. Perhaps the most visual part of this

preparation occurred each week when a beautifully framed image of Our Lady of *Šiluva* was passed from family to family, both in the school on Saturdays and during Mass on Sundays. A large binder filled with information and prayers traveled with the picture, thereby allowing the families to gather in prayer in their own homes. Many families told of experiencing a special closeness and spiritual bonding.

Since devotion takes many forms, an idea to include artists of the region in this celebration was born. Lithuanian painters, sculptors, graphic artists, woodworkers and those working in other media were invited to submit their creations honoring Mary to an art show to be displayed during the May celebration. Over twenty artists submitted beautiful pieces which were displayed at St. Casimir's hall for many weeks. An imposing 65 ft. banner on which the stained glass windows from Lithuanian churches were reproduced, was prominently displayed in the cathedral's exhibition area, along with the dramatic sculpture of Mary by artist Jurgis Šapkus.

Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius, Metropolitan of the diocese of Kaunas in which *Šiluva* is located, was the



In the magnificent new LA Cathedral of the Holy Angeles, Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius SJ, from Lietuva, celebrated the Mass

Photo by Ina Petokas

main Mass celebrant. He was assisted by Msgr. Edmundas Putrimas, delegate for the spiritual guidance of Lithuanians living abroad, Fr. Tomas Karanauskas of St. Casimir's parish as well as guest priests from local parishes and from the Archdiocesan Ethnic Ministries Council. Bishop Oscar Solis, Auxiliary Bishop heading the Office of Ethnic Ministry, opened the celebration with a greeting from the Cardinal and welcomed all present. Flags from various organizations, a special Our Lady of Šiluva banner, a gilt-framed picture of Our Lady, children in native costumes, priests, acolytes, readers and others formed the imposing entry procession. The parish choir, led by Viktoras Ralyš, filled the vast space with well-rehearsed voices. Soloists and the children's choir all combined to create an unforgettable liturgy. Dancers from the Spindulys ensemble, dressed in native costume, stepped elegantly down the aisle placing roses before the displayed picture of Our Lady. The incense, the sweet sounds of praise, the memorable words of the Archbishop brought a tear of joy to many of the 800 faithful gathered.

In addition to the local Lithuanians, members of other ethnic parishes were also in attendance, most notably the Chinese, Japanese, Mayan, African-American, Native American, Filipino, Hungarian, Latvian, German, Estonian, and other representatives. Greetings were received from Cardinal Roger Mahony, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Bishop Baltakis, Ambassador Bruzga and others. All were published in a beautiful commemorative program booklet which also contained the day's liturgy as well as a list of very generous donors. After Mass over 250 guests proceeded to St. Casimir's renovated parish hall for a celebratory dinner. Guests visited with Archbishop Tamkevičius, Msgr. Putrimas, honorary general consul Vytautas Cekanaukas,



Members of the organizing committee - D. Polikaitis, M. Newsom, A. Venskus, R. Giedraitis and J. Venckus
Photo by Mindaugas Petokas

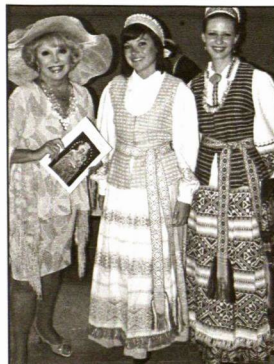


LA dancing group Spindulys

Photo by Mindaugas Petokas

actress Rūta Lee and husband Webb Lowe, and many others. The Knights of Lithuania were represented by a large delegation. Thanks to Marytė Sepikas, all organizing committee members and clergy were presented with hand-inscribed proclamations from the City Council of Los Angeles, highlighting the importance of this religious and cultural event to this city. The celebration of Our Lady of Šiluva 400th Anniversary was a show of solidarity and faith among all present.

Marytė Sandanavičiūtė Newsom, chairperson of the organizing committee; Director of St. Casimir's Lithuanian School; Lithuanian representative to the LA Archdiocesan Ethnic Community Council and Executive Board Secretary; member of St. Casimir's Parish Council; teacher



Actress Rūta Lee, shown with Inga Newsom and Juratė Venckus, attended the celebration
Photo by Ina Petokas

John J. Chernoski

Kaunas, My Kind of Town

On several occasions since 2002 I have had the opportunity to teach at Vytautas Magnus University's School of Law in Kaunas. These teaching stints have given me the chance to explore Kaunas in depth. Similar to a New Yorker who considers New York City to only exist on the Island of Manhattan, to me Kaunas is generally confined to the New Town and Old Town areas. Each area has its own ambience, but they both share and demonstrate a true Lithuanian character and come together to make Kaunas – my kind of town.

During the summer, Kaunas is sometimes perceived as a being a bit dull, but come September, New Town comes alive. Kaunas can be described as a "college town" with several places of higher education located in the New Town general area which include Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas Institute of Technology, and Kaunas Physical Education Academy. During the day and early evening, the major thoroughfare of New Town, Laisves Aleja, is crowded with young, attractive, and stylishly dressed Lithuanians walking about. The Avenue's shops and restaurants generally cater to this crowd. When weather permits, many of the restaurants offer alfresco dining in the European tradition.

Laisves Aleja is reserved for walkers and bikes. The Avenue is more than a thoroughfare; rather it is a cross between an outdoor mall and a gathering place. During the week, Laisves Aleja is crowded with pedestrians, shoppers, street vendors, and the occasional beggar. It is also a center of other activities. This includes folks just sitting on benches, street musicians seeking to earn a few litai, and an occasional surprise. One afternoon I was walking along Laisves Aleja near Miesto Sodas and I came upon what seemed like a festival with children in traditional costumes dancing and singing on a stage. I lingered for awhile to just watch and listen. Before departing I asked one of the parents what was the purpose of the festival. The response was that the event



was a protest against the Kaunas City government, which was planning to close the music hall where the children practiced their singing and dancing. A protest by way of traditional song and dance just seemed so delightfully Lithuanian!

A new addition to the New Town area is the massive Akropolis, a multi-storied indoor shopping mall covering an area of about three city blocks. Located a short walk from the Soboras (St. Michael the Archangel Church) and along the Nemunas River, the Akropolis contains over 200 stores, a grocery, numerous eateries, a multiplex cinema, a bowling alley, and an indoor ice skating ring. The complex is a complete shopping designation and provides an enjoyable escape from inclement weather. My last trip to Kaunas was in November 2007 and I noted much activity at and near the Akropolis, while observing a few vacant shops along nearby Laisves Aleja. Time will tell how the competition from the Akropolis will impact the shops and restaurants along Laisves Aleja. Hopefully the attributes of the Akropolis will combine with the spirit and feel of Laisves Aleja to provide a unique Lithuanian experience for all.

In Old Town there is an immediate change of appearance and attitude. The streets are cobblestone and the majority of the buildings reflect an architectural mix of Gothic and Renaissance styles. Sadly, some of the buildings are in disrepair, but on the positive side, it seems that rehabilitation activities are always going on somewhere in the enclave. The mood and pace of Old Town is much quieter and slower than in New Town and the average person on the street appears older. Old Town with its many historic



buildings and churches is the center of Kaunas's tourist activity with its hub being Rotušės Aikštė. At Rotušės Aikštė, I have encountered various tourist groups including Japanese, German, Polish, and Italian tourists. Numerous interesting museums are adjacent to the square or a short walk away. Unlike New Town, Old Town contains several fine souvenir shops where the tourist may easily find items to remember his or her trip to Kaunas.

While I certainly enjoy my Lithuanian experience when I am in Kaunas, there are occasions when I miss America. However, sometimes opportunities arise in Kaunas to feel American. One of my Kaunas morning routines is to walk down Vilniaus Street (the main thoroughfare in Old Town) to a small café and order a cup of coffee and a small pastry. A pleasant surprise happened one morning when I heard an older man address the staff in English. I struck up a conversation with the gentleman. He was an American from Chicago, while he was not Lithuanian; he had married a Lithuanian woman. The couple had moved to Lithuania to enjoy their retirement years. Another way to find a bit of America in Kaunas is to locate a Mormon missionary. It is fairly easy to spot a Mormon missionary in Kaunas as they are young, walk along the streets in pairs, are neatly dressed in black pants or skirts and coats with name tags, and there is high likelihood they are Americans. A few times I have walked up to Mormon missionaries and struck up a conversation. After agreeing that the discussion of religion was out-of-bounds, I was able to catch up on the latest US sports and national news and I shared with them my Lithuanian story. Another opportunity for me to demonstrate my American pride occurred in a Kaunas tavern. I

was enjoying some fine alus with some of my Lithuanian friends (the discussion was in English) when I answered their question of why Americans generally don't take an interest in soccer. I offered that the spread of soccer was generally accomplished by the influence of the British and that we (Americans) had beaten them (the British) in the American Revolution and in the same way that Americans aren't big tea drinkers, we are not big soccer fans. After this statement, someone a couple tables over asked me in a heavy English accent where I was

from. I replied "Jersey" (at that time I lived in New Jersey.) He replied that he was also from "Jersey." Well, the fellow turned out to be from the Isle of Jersey (the other Jersey.) I expressed my apologies for the soccer comment, but he stated that I had it right.

An element of the American scene that has become part of the Lithuanian scene is basketball. I have been to several home games of Kaunas Žalgiris and I have come away in awe every time. Žalgiris is a well recognized basketball team which plays in the Euro League. Experiencing the Kaunas crowd sing the Lithuanian national anthem with great enthusiasm and pride in a sold-out arena is reason enough to attend a Žalgiris home game. Throughout the game everyone is cheering on Žalgiris, Lithuanian snacks and alus are readily available, and the basketball is great to watch. The Euro League referees seem to call a tight game which requires the players to use their skills, rather than brute strength in order to score and it is interesting to watch the plays develop and strategy being employed; basketball as it was meant to be played.

A seemingly disconnected observation about Kaunas is worth discussing. Where are the Lithuanian squirrels? This issue has become a minor obsession with me. I would ask my Lithuanian friends and students, when was the last time they had seen a squirrel?

My simple question would often cause a perplexed look with the usual reply "I don't remember." When I posed this question in 2004 to my Vytautas Magnus class, one student, Kristina, offered to show me a live Lithuanian squirrel. Kristina worked at a local animal shelter in Kaunas. One Friday morning, we traveled to the shelter

St. George Roman Catholic Lithuanian Church

545 Hudson Avenue, Rochester, New York, 14605

Press Release August, 2008

For Details on Publicity Contact: 585-533-1139

Incorporated in 1908 by Bishop McQuaid, St. George's parish will commemorate its 100th year anniversary Columbus Day weekend, October 11-12, 2008. The parish Steering Committee, chaired by Ms. Litvinas, is planning an engaging schedule of events recognizing this landmark occasion. Beginning with a reception and banquet at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center on Saturday, and concluding on Sunday with a 12:00 noon solemn Mass at St. George's Church, 545 Hudson Avenue, the weekend of celebration will acknowledge the historical significance of the parish.

For a century St. George's has been a religious and cultural focal point sustaining the rich Lithuanian heritage of its parishioners who have contributed to the life of the Rochester community through their active participation in many organizations, among them a community choir, "Putinas," a long-standing radio program, "Dainos Aidas," groups such as scouts, folk dancing, theatrical ensembles and literary clubs. Through the years parishioners also have been staunch supporters of an independent and democratic Lithuania so that its people can exercise the same liberties of worship and citizen-

ship that are cherished in the United States.

The centennial celebration will be an occasion to remember and honor generations of parishioners who have contributed to the long-standing, vibrant history of St. George's church as well as an opportunity for renewal, a time to rekindle friendships and an affiliation with the parish. For more detailed information about planning for the centennial contact Ms. Birutė Litvinas, Chairperson, Steering Committee, at

585-342-9468, or
gkavaliunas@yahoo.com



and there in a cage was a Lithuanian red squirrel. Kristina advised that the shelter had cared for a family of five baby squirrels and that the remaining one in the cage had an injured foot and would be released after the winter. My lengthy quest for the elusive Lithuanian squirrel apparently had made an impression on my students for

on the last day of class they presented me with 8" x 10" framed photo of the young squirrel housed at the animal shelter. Today, the photo of the elusive Lithuanian squirrel is on a wall of my home office and a pleasant daily reminder of Kaunas, its squirrels, and its people.

One of my favorite Kaunas activities is just to stroll down Laisvės Alėja and Vilniaus Street and observe people. Kaunas is considered to be the most Lithuanian city in the nation with the overwhelming majority of the residents being ethnic Lithuanians. In watching the residents of Kaunas going about their daily business, I sometimes contemplate that in a very broad sense I am connected with each of them by sharing a common ancestor on our respective family trees. Kaunas is a great place to feel and be Lithuanian. It is place to see the past being respectfully preserved, the present celebrated, and the future assured. Yes, Kaunas is my kind of town.

John J. Chermoski (Cerniauskas)

John J. Chermoski (Cerniauskas) is a retired attorney and a long time supporter of Lithuanian baseball. He resides in Green Valley, AZ

*Photos by John J. Chermoski

**THE
KANSAS
CITY**
KANSAS
LITHUANIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

The Kansas City Lithuanian Community held their Independence Day Celebration on March 9, 2008 at the Wyandotte County Museum. The Museum is now the permanent home to the St. Casimir's Bell, the bell of the original Lithuanian church here, closed in 1947. The bell was relocated to the museum in 2006. The day's celebration featured a colorful slide presentation about Lithuania by Renata Bakelyte and the debut performance of the new Aidas Children's Dance Group. The program was followed by a potato pancake luncheon

Editor's note: Congratulations to the Aidas Children's Dance Group who made their debut on March 9.

Sally Žemaitytė-Dannov is President of the Lithuanians of America, the Lithuanian American Community in

Kansas City, Kansas. She is also a charter member of the Kansas City Aidas Folk Dance Group. Sally lives in Fairway, Kansas with her husband and two children.

KC Photos by Darius and Jurgita Lukosevicius



Valunė Krupskaitė and Becky Heine before their debut performance



Aidas Children's Dance Group perform Viru Viru Košė

John E. Rikteraitis

Rev. John E. Rikteraitis, 83, retired Pastor of St. Andrew's Church, New Britain, CT, went home to God early Sunday morning, July 13, 2008. Born in New Britain, on July 24, 1925, the son of the late John and Mary (Kaminskas) Rikteraitis, he was raised in New Britain and graduated from New Britain High School. He served his country in the U. S. Navy from 1943-1946, and then went on to St. Thomas Seminary, Bloomfield, CT, 1946-1949, and to St. Mary Seminary, Baltimore, MD, 1950-1956. He was ordained May 10, 1956, by the Most Rev. Henry J. O'Brien, St. Joseph's Cathedral, Hartford, CT. From 1956-1964, he served as Assistant Pastor at St. Casimir Church in New Haven, CT; from 1964-1969, as Assistant Pastor of St. Francis of Assisi, South Windsor, CT; from 1969-1971 as Assistant Pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Hartford, CT; and in 1971 he became Co-Pastor and appointed Pastor of St. Andrew's Church, New Britain, CT on November 12, 1976.



Through the years, Fr. John was very involved with the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Priests' League of Connecticut and the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Priests' League of America, serving in several offices of both and the Connecticut Catholic Lithuanians (CCL). He was instrumental in the erection of the Lithuanian Wayside Cross on the grounds of St. Joseph's Cathedral in Hartford and has taken several crosses from the U.S. to be erected on the Hill of Crosses, the unique shrine near Šiauliai. Fr. John was also the Spiritual Advisor for the Knights of Lithuania, Council 6, in Hartford, CT. His popular saying was "Praise the Lord" whenever he answered the phone, entered a room or said Mass.

Fr. Rikteraitis is survived by his sister, Mary, and her husband, Ben Hicks, of New Britain; his brother, William, and his wife, Ginny Richter, of Hamden, CT; several nieces and nephews and three grand-nieces. Donations may be made to St. Andrew's Church, 396 Church Street, New Britain, CT 06051.

Submitted by Leona E. Sawka, Vytis Correspondent, Knights of Lithuania, Council 6, Hartford, CT.

What are you looking for?

Maybe your place in God's plan is with the Lithuanian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Putnam, CT. Did you perhaps come and visit them and talk about it? People have a natural desire for happiness. As we all know, this desire is of divine origin and God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw man to himself who alone can fulfill us.

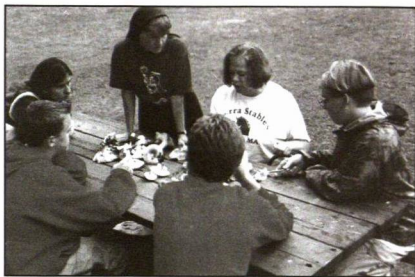
When we hear that our Lithuanian parishes are closing we are upset and angry with our bishops and even our friends that they neglect our Lithuanian parishes by not attending them. But we do not ask ourselves one question. Where are we heading? Are we investing ourselves fully in the life of the Church through prayer, through studying the Holy Scripture, the celebration of the Eucharist?

We are constantly being formed in the will of God through faith. "Do not be conformed to this world" says St. Paul in Romans 12:2, "but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

We live in an age characterized by business and we do get impatient because our computer is "too slow". It has been said that you are too busy to pray for vocations, you will not get any vocations in your parish; neither priestly, nor women called to consecrated life. It is sad to hear when some people say to us that Lithuanians do not pray enough for vocations to priestly life and that we miss them in our Lithuanian parishes.

The year 2008 is the Jubilee Year to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the apparition of Our Lady, Mary-Mother of God in SILUVA. We should find time this year to pray for all Lithuanian parishes and Communities in the U.S.A. And for all others scattered all over the world, that the young men hear the call of God and come and serve their own people in Lithuanian Communities. God continues to call many young men to the priesthood, those called are too busy now or do not want to answer the call.

The first two encyclicals, on love and hope written by our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI were consciously framed to speak to the fears of a deeply conflicted world by reminding the world of Christianity's basic message: "by changing lives and changing history and they do this through the power to propose and persuade religiously and morally. What we do need today: "being the hands and heart of God takes courageous, confident and committed men and women. Then the true Catholic



Sister Laimutė, formerly of Lithuania, teaches children about mushrooms at Camp Neringa.

person should be haunted by a longing to see the invisible God in all things. The Catholic spiritual journey is an adventure into the two-fold freedom of intimacy with God and service for others."

Sister Margarita Bareikaitė

Sister Margarita Bareikaitė belongs to the order of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a Lithuanian order in Putnam, CT. Sister Margarita is the Chair of the Religious Affairs Council of the Lithuanian American Community and is a regular contributor to Bridges.

NOVEMBER 1-2, 2008

SATURDAY NOON TO 6 pm & SUNDAY NOON TO 6 pm

LITHUANIAN MUGĖ FESTIVAL

Entertainment on both days will be Folk dancing, Kaimo Kapela, Charlie the clown for the kids.

There will be plenty of Lithuanian food Beer Including the world's greatest Bulviniai Blynai (Potato pancakes)

Plenty of arts and crafts beautiful amber Lithuanian sashes, ties, t-shirts, selection of Lithuanian Books and CD.

Lithuanian Music Hall is celebrating its 100 Anniversary 1908 - 2008

LITHUANIAN MUSIC HALL
2715 E. ALLEGHENY AVE., PHILA., PA
19134 (215)739-4831

“Šokių Šventė”

A Lithuanian Holiday



Lithuanians love folk dancing, singing, basketball and, on occasion, a cold beer or two -- with a passion! Much has been written about the great success of the Lithuanian Basketball Team -- since 1992, two Olympic Bronze Medals, one European Championship, but not as much about its Folk Dance and Song Festivals even though both are an intrinsic part of the Lithuanian Culture.

From 1949 through 1950 there was a mass migration of the Lithuanian people to America. After getting acclimated to their new environs, the resilient Lithuanians started to revive some of their beloved cultural traditions -- among them -- the “Šokių Šventė” (the Folk Dance festival).

It was in 1957, in Chicago, that the Lithuanian American Community organized the first Folk Dance Festival outside Lithuania. Since then, there have been 12 “Šokių Šventė” and with three exceptions, (one in Cleveland, two in Canada -- Hamilton and Toronto), all of them took place in Chicago. Each of the “Šokių Šventė” had over a thousand dancers and thousands of spectators. During the past several “Šokių Šventė” there have been dance groups from Germany, Australia, Argentina, Brazil and most recently from Lithuania itself.

This year, on July 6th, the Thirteenth “Šokių Šventė” took place in Los Angeles, California. And what a magnificent show it was! Now, the question that immediately comes to mind is how did this huge, spectacular show wind up on the West Coast?

A VISION

About two years ago, Danguolė Varnienė, the current President of the Lithuanian Dance Teachers Association, had a vision. Until now the “Šokių Šventė” have taken place in the Midwest or Canada, why not have the 2008 “Šokių Šventė” in Los Angeles! The conditions are right. Now is the perfect time for the big show to the move city of big shows! Danguolė approached the Lithuanian American Community's National



Danguolė Varnienė, “Let the show begin!”

Photo by Rimas Gedekla

Executive Committee's President Vytas Maciunas and its Chairman of the Board of Directors, Danguolė Navickienė, with her vision. Her presentation was so persuasive, so moving that the only possible decision was - let's go and do it!

The “Šokių Šventė” was a “go”. Its Artistic Director, Danguolė Varnienė, was now in place. Now, all that remained was finding the right person to run the entire extravaganza. To find such a person they did not have to look further than their own back yard. Jurgis Joga, the Secretary of the Lithuanian American's Community's Board of Directors was the right person. Now, to get him on board!

After weighing all the factors, Joga agreed to accept their proposal only if the Chairman's position would be delineated among three people. If this was agreeable, he would then find the other two Co-Chairmen. He did -- Rimas Stockus, and Donatas Empakeris.

The Team was now in place. Let's get the show on the road!

CONCERNS

The most pressing concerns confronting the organizers were: (1). Would LA's Lithuanian Community support such a huge, time consuming undertaking, and, (2). Would there be sufficient number of dance groups and spectators coming to LA -- considering that LA is thousands of miles away from the center of Lithuanian population areas? (Midwest and the East Coast).

Their first concern was short lived. Within several weeks, 25 people volunteered to help the administrative committee, 32 volunteers offered their various artistic skills to the artistic committee, and 25 volunteers offered to help during the “Šokių Šventė” The Los Angeles Lithuanians were not only very charitable with their services; they were just as generous with their financial support.



Meeting and greeting old friends

Photo by Rimas Gedekla

All in all it goes to show you that Los Angeles is a truly giving, caring Lithuanian Community!

Now, what about the second concern? Granted LA is thousands of miles from the Lithuanian centers; nevertheless, where there is a will there is a way. Many spectators coming from the Midwest or the East Coast decided to see the West Coast. Thus, they proceeded to plan their holidays around the "Šokių Šventė." Some came before the "Šokių Šventė," others stayed after the "Šokių Šventė."

How about the dancers?

Well, you know the dancers -- whenever, wherever there is a "Šokių Šventė," they will always find a way to get there. They came - forty dance groups - from the USA, Canada and even four groups from Lithuania. Eleven hundred dancers danced into the City of Angeles!

Here they come!

It is Thursday, July 3, 2008 and the Hilton Hotel, from early afternoon until late in the evening, is buzzing with arriving Lithuanians - dancers, spectators. All day, all evening, all night they arrived! Laughter, joyful greetings were heard throughout the lobby. Old friends greeting each other, shaking hands, embracing! It was one, great big reunion! What a sight!

The next day, July 4, 2008 at 8:00 AM all the dancers began to gather in the lobby and from there saunter over to the huge banquet hall for the first general practice. The practice lasted till 3:00 in the afternoon. Afterwards the dancers were on their own. Some went to see the nearby Universal Studios, others went out to eat, to talk, "to catch up with things," to make new friends.

Now it is early Saturday morning, 7:00 AM to be precise, and the dancers are dancing from the elevators, through the lobby and outside where the ever present Jurgis Joga is directing them to various buses, motioning the buses to start heading towards the USC Galen Area for the all day general practice session. At last, all the dancers were gone, all the buses were gone -- and all was very quiet at the Hilton - for, about 95% of its occupants had departed.

Around 6:00 that evening the buses began to come back bringing tired but happy dancers. They hurriedly got off the buses, headed to their rooms to prepare the evening's main event - the "Susipažinimo Vakaras." (A get acquainted dance). It is here that the dancers would be



The hat dance, "Kepurinė"

Photo by Rimas Gedeika

able to show off their more modern dancing skills, socialize and in general, have a blast!

Not wanting to spend the entire Saturday evening with members of the more "Mature Generation," I sneaked off to see what was happening downstairs. As I got nearer to where the action was - I could hear the music blasting, feel its pulsating rhythms. I saw hundreds of beaming faces, smiles from ear to ear, laughing, all dancing to their own beat, which was very unfamiliar to me. (My beat ended with the Rolling Stones!). No one could tell that three hours ago they spent 10 hours practicing various folk dances.

Let the Show Begin!

And finally, the "Big Day" arrived-Sunday, July 6, 2008. As on the previous day, the dancers began to move out of the hotel—this time; however, they were dressed in their traditional national costumes. And, again they were ably directed to the buses as the buses moved out by Jurgis Joga (It was at this point in time that I thought I overheard someone say that Jurgis was now more than qualified to join LA's Traffic Division!). By 9:00 AM, the hotel was almost empty -- the only people who remained were those who attended the special Mass celebrated in the hotel's banquet hall and those who stayed for the hotel's great breakfast buffet.

The festivities began at 1:30 PM with the grand entrance of the dancers. Eleven hundred marched into Galen Arena from its four corners. They entered confidently, with a lively step, with huge grins on their faces, eager to start. After everyone



Jurgis Joga - Move 1,100 dancers with two buses! You gotta be kidding!

Photo by Rimas Gedeika

was settled in their places, the guests of honor marched in. In came Lithuanian's Ambassador to America, Andrius Bruszga, the show's Master of Ceremonies, Rūta Lee (Kilmonytė), the Lithuanian American Community's National Executive Committee's

President Vytas Maciunas, Canada's Lithuanian Community's National Executive Committee's President, Joana Kuraitė-Lasaienė, the show's artistic director, Danguolė Varnienė and the show's Co-Chairman, Jurgis Joga.

After this Rūta Lee took over. And did she ever! What a great MC! She had the crowd in her hands. Keeping them involved, laughing, cheering loudly, and eagerly listening to her every word. I was truly impressed with her stage performance, but what impressed me even more was seeing that Rūta was truly proud of her Lithuanian heritage and that it was an honor for her, as well as for us, to be the show's MC. I was thoroughly surprised how fluently she spoke Lithuanian.

After Rūta introduced the aforementioned guests of honor and after they gave their short speeches, she asked Danguolė Varnienė to come to the center of the stage. She did. And what a rousing, thunderous applause she received. Everyone, the dancers as well as the spectators, really appreciated the many hours that she devoted in preparation for this spectacular event.

Danguolė, without much ado -- raised her hands high and proclaimed loudly, "Let the show begin!"

And with those words the Thirteenth "Šokių Šventė" became history!

The program

Due to the various reasons mentioned earlier in this article, the audience was around 3,800. This number was less than in previous years, but what it lacked in numbers it certainly made up in its enthusiastic, thunderous ovations. The energy that it generated exuded throughout the area so much that even the dancers felt the extra exhilaration which enabled them to skip faster, jump higher. The audience and the dancers were very much in tune with one another. All the dance groups -- from the youngest through those who were veterans -- danced



The best smiles in the world!
Photo by Rimas Gedeika



Rūta Lee and a dancer singing the Lithuanian National Anthem
Photo by Rimas Gedeika

each dance with great vigor, with joy at being able to do what they really loved. They were not professionals. They made mistakes, but they quickly and effortlessly corrected them and continued dancing with zest and always with big smiles on their faces. You could see that they enjoyed dancing -- so you made a mistake -- so what! You recover and continue dancing with a smile.

Forty groups danced. And how well they danced! However, there was one group of dancers that particularly caught my eye. From a fellow photographer I learned that this group was not Lithuanian but rather it was composed of eight American students from Duke University. You could easily see that they loved to dance and that they possessed the skills for dancing. They had no problem mastering the intricate steps, the complex maneuvers. They fit perfectly with the other groups.

This group was organized and taught by Lithuanian twin sisters who are attending Duke University -- Laura and Rima Seštokaite. How they organized this group, how they taught them the dances will be covered in our next issue. But for now, suffice it to say, that they were truly "Lithuanians for a Day." Nice going, Duke! Bravo Laura and Rima!

The mixture of dances was excellent. The choreographers did a fantastic job of smoothly moving the various groups in and out. It was interesting to observe how they intermixed the various props (a giant Gaidys (rooster), a big bowl with young kids in it) with the dances themselves. Their dance selections were for the appropriate age groups -- although some of the veterans were overheard saying -- hey, I can



The Dance of the Garlands, "Sidir Vidir Žolynėlis"

Photo by Laima Reiss

dance that polka! Dreaming, Oh, I'm Dreaming!

The program's final two dances were the most exhilarating, the liveliest the most popular of all Lithuanian folk dances -- MALŪNAS and SUKTINIS.

MALŪNAS, or the Windmill, is by far my favorite dance. It is a fantastic dance for it simultaneously brings all the dancers onto the floor. They start by performing several individual windmills at the same time. Then, as the music gets louder and louder, there is a whirlwind of motion -- feet and skirts are flying. The small individual windmills begin to disappear and slowly, at first, huge windmill blades start to appear. Each dancer is running faster and faster to catch up with the faster and faster moving blades. Faster and faster around they go. The audience picks up the beat; their clapping begins to get louder and louder! Soon the audience and the dancers become one. Wow, what an exhilarating rush!

No sooner does the MALŪNAS end, and before the dancers can fully catch their breaths, the SUKTINIS begins. This dance is also a fast dance, but it allows the various groups on the floor to do their "thing." Some are dancing the polka step, some are dancing in a single line, while others are dancing in a big circle with their partners on their shoulders. The music keeps on playing, the dancers keep on dancing and I keep on getting this fantastic urge to join in. But to do that would be a disaster in the making, and so I continue taking photos.

Finally the music stopped, so did the dancing, but the laughter, the joyful buzzing continued until all the dancers left the floor and only the Gaidys, and the bowl remained. So ended a great show in a city of great shows.

The Final Curtain

That evening a huge banquet attended by over 700 people celebrated the closing of the "Šokių Šventė." The food was great; the drinks were better. During a pause in the eating and drinking, a short program took place during which all the people who helped coordinate the "Šokių Šventė" were recognized and roundly applauded. The Lithuanian American Community's National Executive Committee's President Vytautas Maciunas, together with the Vice President of the Cultural Affairs Committee, Dale Lukienė, presented a special award to the three Co-Chairmen: J. Joga, D. Empakeris, and R. Stockus and to the Artistic Director, Danguolė Varnienė. Each received and Audio CD of Vytauto Volerto latest book, "Pranyko ir tiek."



Sheer enjoyment

Photo by Rimas Gedeika

Shortly thereafter, the tables were cleared and the music started. While the older generation danced their favorite oldies but goodies indoors under the lights, the younger generation danced outdoors under the stars. But as in any such event -- soon the two intermingled -- and danced the night away.

What now?

Monday came and it was time to depart. There were tears, hugs, promises to write. Old friendships rekindled, new friendships started, thus achieving "Šokių Šventė" primary goal -- keeping the Lithuanians together, making them feel proud to be Lithuanians, keeping the Lithuanian spirit going!



V. Maciunas and D. Lukienė presenting Audio CD of Vytautas Volertas' book, "Pranyko ir Tiek" to D. Empakeris, D. Varnienė, J. Joga and R. Stockus

Photo by Rimas Gedeika

Thank you, Los Angeles, for organizing such a great "Šokių Šventė." Thank you for providing us the opportunity to dance and to enjoy being Lithuanians. Great job!!

And now -- where to next?

Rimas Gedeika

Rimas Gedeika lives in New Jersey. He is a member of the National Executive Committee of the Lithuanian American Community serving as Vice- President for Special Projects. He is also active in the Lithuanian Sports Community and is the administrator of Bridges.



An American and Lithuanian Partnership

Every profession is special and every one is important. It would be unfair to distinguish one or another. When choosing a future occupation each of us should listen to our heart, set goals, work toward them and watch the goals come true. We shouldn't be influenced by anyone or anything making this kind of decision, we have to love our job, only then we'll do it well. To get the job of our dreams and build a good career in our chosen field we have to get an education. It is always great to study abroad where you can get invaluable experience and training to bring back home. And for me it is always a pleasure to write about Lithuanians who are studying abroad not only building great careers for themselves, but also building a good name and reputation for their country.



Major Arūnas Gajauskas meets Kansas State Chief Justice Lawton R. Nuss

Today I want to write about one Army college in Kansas. Since 1996 there have been thirteen Lithuanian military students who graduated from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth (KS). In 1881 on May 7th the Commanding General of the Army directed the founding of a school for cavalry and infantry at Fort Leavenworth. The next year "The School of Application for Cavalry and Infantry" was established. The first class graduated in July of



Honorary Citizen Day - Major Arūnas Gajauskas receives an honorary first city of Kansas citizen award from Leavenworth Mayor Laura Gasbarre

1883. In 1894 the first Allied officer from Switzerland attended the school. Since 1946 the college was redesigned into the Command and General Staff College. The Fort Leavenworth Hall of Fame was dedicated in 1970. The college has a long and interesting history. This year is special. It is the college's International Military Student graduate centennial celebration. And we proudly want to inform our readers that a Lithuanian, Major Arūnas Grajauskas, graduated this celebratory year. We'll learn more about him a little later. For now, let me tell you more about the college.

The mission of the Command and General Staff College is to educate leaders in the values and practice of the profession of arms, to act as the executive agent for the Army's Leader Development Program, to develop doctrine that guides the Army, and to promote and support the advancement of military art and science.

International Military Student participation in the college is consistent with long standing US policy regarding provision of Foreign Military Assistance to countries with which we share ideals and security interests. International Military Students are invited based on regional security engagement priorities. Invitations are issued by the Headquarters, Department of the Army, to individual countries. The sending country identifies a candidate who meets the prerequisites. Subject to testing and vetting, the student is

accepted into training.

This year one Lithuanian international military student graduated in June. There were 12 more Lithuanian students who graduated, with participation beginning in 1996. According to the Chief of the International Military Student Division at the College, Jim Fain, the Lithuanian students have been doing an outstanding job representing their country and the military armed forces. The past graduates have especially done well in highlighting the great and diverse history of their nation. The international students attend courses at Fort Leavenworth for approximately 50 weeks. They begin with an international preparatory course to teach them about America and the U.S. military. Then they attend the CGSC preparatory course to learn more in depth about how the U.S. Army functions to include acronyms - something they will need throughout the course. This course is attended with their U.S. counterparts from the Marines, Navy, Air Force and other government agencies as a preparation for the actual course which is 10 months long. Each class is divided into staff groups of approximately 16 individuals which include one international student, one Navy or Marine, one Air Force, one Infantry, one Armor, one Aviator, etc. This way each class is diverse in its mindset which allows for excellent learning from each other and each other's experiences.

Currently there are two classes a year at the college - one that starts and ends in June and one that starts in January and ends in December. There is a Lithuanian student scheduled for the winter of 2009.

And now let me introduce you to the Lithuanian officer who graduated from the CGSC on June 13 of this year. Maj. Arūnas Gajauskas is an Infantry Officer in the Lithuania Armed Forces, who has been serving his country

for 14 years. He was born and grew up in Tauragė (Lithuania). He currently resides in Vilnius, along with his family. He was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant after graduating in the class of 1996 from the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy in Lithuania. He has held different positions throughout his military career to include Infantry Platoon Leader, Infantry Company Commander, Instructor in the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy, Artillery officer in Lithuanian Land forces Command, ADC to Land forces Commander and ADC to Chief of Defense of Lithuania Armed Forces. Before being selected to attend CGSC in Fort Leavenworth, he was Infantry Battalion XO. As for his operational experiences, Maj. Gajauskas served as a Security Company Commander in the Lithuanian Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan (2005). He loves playing basketball, football and tennis; and he is very passionate reader. He enjoys outdoor sports and traveling to different countries. Arūnas is married to his beloved wife Gina and they have been blessed with their children Domas (3 yrs.), and Arnas (7 months). After graduation from CGSC, Arūnas returned to Lithuania to continue performing his duties. Arūnas was proud to study in the U.S. He gladly agreed to



Major Arūnas Gajauskas is presented with an International Military Student Division coin by Mr. Jim Fain, Chief of IMSD



Major Arūnas Gajauskas presents his colors at the annual Opening Day International Flag Ceremony commemorating the start of the academic year at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College with his fellow International Classmates in front of the Lewis and Clark Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

share his experience and thoughts with us: "Lithuanian and American relationships were special from the very beginning. As far as I know, it was only one country which did not recognize the Soviet occupation of Lithuania. This fact means a lot for me. Of course during this year I met many polite people but not everything was a pleasant situation. But these were the exceptions, not the rules. This country really has great opportunities and wonderful people. I enjoyed every single day that I spent here. During winter break my family and I took the opportunity to visit many places. We flew to Las Vegas, rented a car and made a road trip up to L.A. It was really exciting. After this trip I realized that if you were stationed in one state you can not say that you saw America. This country is so huge and so beautiful. In college we have the best facilities for studies. The building is brand new. Every classroom is an example of high-tech. Every seat is computerized, all students have the opportunity to use libraries on line, and all the instructors are available for consultations after regular classes. People who work in IMSD are available almost 24/7. It's very important at the beginning, when you just start your studies. Because usually you have tons of questions and God bless these people who are always

ready to help in any situation. Also I need to mention that every international student has 3 sponsors for the year. Their jobs are to help in all situations. And last, but not least – are classmates. I was amazed how much patience they have. At the beginning of the course it's very difficult to understand everything if English is not your native tongue. I thank them for their tolerance in listening to all my broken English and not always smart questions".

In the CJSC Arūnas was studying many military subjects. This education in NATO is recognized as an intermediate plus. It is very important for him because now Arūnas has the possibility to earn a higher rank and occupy certain positions in the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Also, because of multinational assignments it will be much easier to serve in the coalition with US soldiers. Of course we wish him all the best in his future career.

Eugenija MISEVICIUS

*Photos by Lieutenant Colonel Teena M. Barber,
U.S. Army CGSC IMSD PAO

Eugenija MISEVICIUS is a graduate of the University of Bridgeport, Bridgeport, CT. She serves as the secretary of the Lithuanian Journalist Association. Her passion is reading, traveling and participation in amateur sports such as martial arts. She and her husband, Laurynas, participate in many Lithuanian events.

The Way Things Used To Be

Before the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway was built, Brooklyn's Williamsburg neighborhood was a vital, thriving enclave. Grand Street ran through the middle of Williamsburg, starting as Grand Avenue in Maspeth and ending at the East River, by the giant Domino Sugar plant. A major commercial thoroughfare, it was bisected by others just as important and historic - Roebling Street, Havemeyer Street, Bedford Avenue, Lorimer Street, Graham Avenue, Bushwick Avenue. Most important to my family was the intersection of Grand Street and Marcy Avenue, where we lived for many years. Our tenement house at 48 Marcy Avenue was owned and occupied by Lithuanians - two branches of the Laukaitis family, Mrs. Slagus and her son Eddie, and ourselves, the Kivetas.

Marcy Avenue ended at Metropolitan Avenue, which faced North Fifth Street, where Annunciation Church stood, with its rectory, elementary school and convent.

Next door to the rectory was Aromiskis' Funeral Home, where a majority of parishioners received respectful final services. In those days, the funeral parlor was open all day, and members of the bereaved family had to decide who was going to keep watch during which hours of the day. Many of the parish's elderly ladies would spend a couple of hours keeping the family company, or just quietly praying the rosary. It didn't matter, whether they were acquainted with the deceased, or not.

One block down on Marcy Avenue toward Metropolitan Avenue, lived some other Lithuanian families - Mr.

& Mrs. Bagdonas, with their son Albinas and daughter Aldona; Mr. & Mrs. Mockeliunas with their daughters Regina and Diana; the Dabulis family, and Mr. & Mrs. Lutus (the plumber), with their daughter Amy.

If you made a left on Grand Street at Marcy Avenue, you would find Šimanski's Butcher Shop. Šimanski was a handsome, sturdy fellow, a Lithuanian Jew, who ran a prosperous business and made the world's best *skilandis*. He was a sharp and honest businessman.

A couple of blocks further south on Marcy Avenue, Pastrami King reigned, selling the tastiest pastrami and long, fat french fries. The steaming, fragrant pastrami was pulled from a heavy pot, speared on a great big fork, and sliced paper-thin.

Havemeyer Street ran parallel to Marcy Avenue, and was the main shopping venue for most of the area's inhabitants. It was an immigrant's neighborhood, and a great many of the shoppers, as well as the shopkeepers, spoke little English. That did not impede commerce on Havemeyer Street, where many languages were spoken and business was brisk.

There were several general grocery stores, as well as apparel stores that sold clothing for the entire family. One tiny store was devoted to hosiery of all kinds. Stockings came in pairs, of course, as that was well before the days of pantyhose. The stockings were packaged, delicately folded, in slim cardboard boxes, since that was also well before today's ubiquitous plastic packaging. The salesperson would display several different shades of silk or nylon stockings, by inserting her own hand, fisted to prevent snags, into one of them.

"Izzy" sold ladies' undergarments from a tiny shop whose entrance was guarded by a small section of iron fencing. "Izzy" would search through box after box on his crowded shelves, to find the exact model and size of bra to suit his customer. Extracting one bra after another, he would delicately unfold them, propping the cups open for display and gazing inquiringly at his customer, before moving over to the next model. Often, there were as many as ten bras arrayed on his counter, before the customer finally made her decision, but he never lost his "cool". He also sold panties, girdles and housedresses. As a young girl, accompanying my mother and elder sister on shopping excursions, I often thought what a chore it must have been for "Izzy" to refold everything and put it all away again in all the different boxes.

There were a few dairy stores, but Mama usually patronized the smaller one, that had a life-size black & white cow in the front window. Pre-packaged butter wasn't very popular and couldn't compare with barrel butter in texture or taste. The proprietor carved the required amount of pale yellow butter from a large barrel that prominently stood on its side on a middle shelf. Milk and cream were sold in glass bottles of various sizes; these had to be washed when emptied and returned to collect the deposit. Eggs were sold either by the dozen, half-dozen, or even singly.

One corner store had a window from which fancy things like charlotte russe and fresh-cut halvah were sold.

Another tiny store on Havemeyer Street belonged to the pickle man. Large barrels of pickles in various stages of sourness gave off a wonderful dilly, garlicky scent. The



The house at the very end of Grand Street, across the street from The East River and Domino Sugar. It is more than 100 years old, which I know because my grandfather lived there with his family in 1900. It is still inhabited.

pickle man also sold herring and smoked fish. His store was always crowded, especially at Christmas and Easter time.

Every Lithuanian housewife had several strong shopping bags that she had sewn herself, and carried on her shopping trips to Havemeyer Street. More often than not, she was accompanied on these trips by a young son or daughter, drafted for the job of porter.

Meyers' Bakery did landmark business every Sunday; there were long lines of customers stretching around the corner when each Mass let out from Queen of Angels and Annunciation Churches. Their fragrant, yeasty rolls and rye bread could not be beat, and their cakes and pies were incomparable. Of

course, if one lived in a different neighborhood, a bit further away, such as Holy Trinity parish, then one would buy one's baked goods at the famous Lithuanian-owned Scholes Bakery.

One didn't necessarily have to go out oneself in order to buy - there were many street vendors, who made their way through the neighborhoods with horse and wagon, or truck, selling fresh fruits and vegetables. I particularly remember the watermelon man, who used to call "watty-mellow"! Another fellow had a little push-wagon with a heater attached, and customers could choose an apple or pieces of coconut, to be speared on a stick and dipped into the warm jelly. The same man sold hot sweet potatoes and roasted chestnuts in the wintertime.

The knife-and-scissors grinder made his rounds periodically by horse and wagon at first, then with a primitive little truck, sounding a loud bell to announce his arrival. Kids gathered around to watch the sparks sent out by the wheel as the grinder did his work.

One of the most important vendors during those days was the iceman, the same person being the coalman during the heating season. For several years following WWII, many families still used the old-fashioned ice-box for food storage and cooling. Our iceman brought in the required square of ice on his shoulder, and placed it in its space in our ice-box, where it sat for a few days, melting until it had to be replaced. The melt traveled down a pipe that led to a basin under the ice-box, and it was our job to empty it before it could overflow. Most times, Mama had to remind us. In wintertime, we had a metal box, about 18 inches

long, 12 inches deep, 12 inches high, with one shelf and sliding doors, that was kept on our fire escape, and served as a freezer.

Each family in our house had an assigned shanty space in the basement, and our coal was delivered to our shanty by a series of interlocking chutes that were sent through the small cellar window at the front of the house. It was brought up bucket by bucket as needed to fire up and feed the squat black coal stove in the kitchen. We had a small, neat gas stove that stood alongside, and this was used for most of our cooking. But Mama's cheese blintzes, *kugelis*, baked whitefish, and *pyragas* were delicious products of her cooking expertise and the coal stove's oven, and unbeatable.

Few homes had washing machines, which at that time were big, round, clumsy clunkers that would take up almost half the available floor space in the kitchen. So most families took their washing to one of the many neighborhood laundries. These were often in a half-basement location, a few steps down and behind a plate glass window. The clothing to be washed was weighed, and notes taken as to the type and brand of washing materials desired. A family could pick up their finished wash, or have it delivered. On sunny days, wooden frames were brought out to stand in front of the laundry, drying the lace curtains that had been stretched onto the pins set into the frames, spaced about a half-inch apart.

Grand Street was home to a few Lithuanian owned saloons, one of them being Johnny Valens', where a generous free lunch was set out, according to the customs of the times. Ham, roast pork, hard-boiled eggs, rye bread and other fare was

offered, to encourage you to "wet your whistle".

Ginkus' Ice Cream Parlor on Grand Street was a successful business, run by a Lithuanian family for many years. Delicious homemade ice cream was offered along with candies, chocolates and lunches. This was a regular "pit-stop" for Annunciation Church choir members after Friday night rehearsals.

St. Catherine's Hospital was on Bushwick Avenue, a red-brick gothic building that appeared the epitome of Victorian architecture. It served the community for many years, also training generations of nurses in its nursing school, whose residence was named Jennings Hall, before closing and being demolished. The nurse's cap was a beautiful miniature version of the large coif worn by France's Notre Dame nuns.

Knipes' Drug Store was an old landmark drug store on Grand Street near Bushwick or Graham Avenues; it had a gazebo-like structure in the middle of its floor that was a U.S. Post Office Branch.

Annunciation Parish held its annual

picnic in a bucolic place called Klasčiaus Clinton Park, a large grassy picnic area in Cypress Hills. Families would send someone out early, to reserve a good table under a tree or close to the bandstand building. Ladies made arrangements to share table space with close friends, and arrived with younger children laden down with foods of their own preparation. At dusk, the band struck up a tune, and the dancing began: waltz, fox trot, and of course, one furious polka after another. Later on, Miss Lithuania would be chosen from among the young ladies in attendance. As the evening wore on, the older folk grouped together, singing old Lithuanian songs, bringing memories of home and lots of nostalgia.

Ours was a neighborhood whose ethnic majority was Italian. Their parish, located a few blocks away, was Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. Each year, during the summer, they would have their Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and San Paolino, during which more than a hundred men came together to lift and carry the "Giglio", a platform and tower

weighing more than a ton, "dancing" the tower, with its band playing hymns and old favorites, throughout the neighborhood, distributing scapulars, collecting contributions and entertaining everyone.

That was all of at least 65 years ago, and the passage of time has brought many changes, including several wars and "urban development" that ruined neighborhoods instead of developing anything worthwhile. Just about the only thing that remains the same is the Annunciation Parish Picnic, which is now held in the old schoolyard and basement hall of the school, and the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and San Paolino. The Giglio will "dance" this year, just as before. Patrons will stream into the streets, to enjoy Italian delicacies like sausage & peppers and sugared zeppoli.

Buon Appetito!

Skanaus!

Gloria Kivytaite O'Brien

Gloria Kivytaite O'Brien is a frequent contributor to Bridges.

She grew up in Brooklyn, Annunciation Parish. Gloria can be contacted at Senaboba@aol.com.

October 11-12, 2008 Centennial Celebration

St. George Roman Catholic Lithuanian Church

545 Hudson Avenue, Rochester, New York, 14605

Saturday, October 11

- 12:30 p.m. Concert (*Sacred Heart Cathedral, Rochester*)
From Lithuania – Youth Choir of the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- 6:00 p.m. Reception and Banquet (*Rochester Riverside Convention Center*)

Sunday, October 12

- 12:00 p.m. Solemn Mass (*St. George Church*)
- Brunch to follow

Information and ticket reservations:

Contact Ms. Birutė Litvinas at 585-342-9468 or gkavaliunas@yahoo.com
Deadline for reservations is September 12, 2008



Joseph R. Vadus

Vilnius Visit

I made my 6th visit to Lithuania in May, mainly Vilnius. It was the first time I was thoroughly drenched with several days of heavy rain. Now I know why Lietus is part of Lietuva. I always stay at the Radisson which helped offset the dreary rain. The Radisson staff is very accommodating and personable and their buffets are outstanding.

Since my visit last summer, the Vilnius Airport has been expanded and remodeled and given a major face lift. Upon arrival, it presents an appealing contemporary façade, with easy access. Another pleasant surprise after 3 years, is the completion of reconstruction of the main plaza and park in front of Rotušė (City Hall), the scene of frequent special outdoor events.

Once again, I was pleased to meet with my friend Žilvinas Bieliauskas, Director of The Information Center for Homecoming Lithuanians, and Editor of their daily Newsletter that provides excellent summaries of the news and includes paragraph-size translations of the Lithuanian newspapers. Žilvinas invited me to the Jonas Mekas Visual Arts Center near the National Library. The center features the artistic work of Jonas Mekas and George Maciunas and other Lithuanian contemporary, Avant garde artists. Former Vilnius Mayor Artūras Zuokas is the Chairman and prime mover of the center and a planned new major cultural project. In April, at the US-Baltic Foundation Gala in Washington, I met Zuokas and Jonas Mekas and they mentioned the Center and plan to build the Heritage-Guggenheim Museum in central Vilnius near the Neris River. While visiting the center, I absorbed

some of the exhibited art and especially three scale models of the competing designs for the Heritage-Guggenheim Museum by three prominent architects. The winning design was by Zaha Hadid of London. It's a sleek design that looks like a spaceship that could take off at any time. If the new museum is built, it will provide a great cultural attraction for Vilnius and nearby Baltic Nations of Latvia and Estonia. Next year, 2009, Vilnius celebrates the millennium anniversary commemorating the first recognition of Lithuania. Vilnius has been declared the Cultural Capital of Europe. The new Museum would be most appropriate as a major cultural addition. Prominent Lithuanian artists Jonas Mekas and George Maciunas and their "Fluxus Movement" could be a focus to promote a museum for the Avant garde. A feasibility study of the New Museum is underway and Artūras Zuokas is the initiator and spokesman. In April, he said he plans to run for Parliament in October.

While at the Center, Žilvinas invited me to listen to a plan for their new project to produce a DVD film to welcome émigrés and others to return to Lithuania. The film will show opportunities and advantages for settling in Lithuania. The film would assist those looking for career opportunities and for living a more relaxed and uncluttered life with a more reasonable cost of living. The film would describe job opportunities, steps in gaining citizenship; finding suitable housing; introductions to recreation and community activities; school enrollment; investment opportunities, and other attractions. It would



Reconstructed plaza in front of Rotušė on Didžioji Street.



Meeting at the center with DVD Film planners: L to R. Joseph Vadus, Marijus Bagdonavicius (standing) Žilvinas Bieliauskas, and Edmundas Atkociunas



Contemporary visual art is displayed and three scale models of competing designs of the Heritage-Guggenheim Museum

show several examples of happy resettlements or new settlements. They are presently outlining the film contents for the documentary DVD. We must now await the completion and premiere showing.

As always, a visit to Vilnius is enjoyable and interesting.

Joseph R. Vadus

"ICE COLD BEER"

Article appeared in "Signals" by Ed Shakalis, Class 38-44

During my service with the 24th Infantry Division Signal Company while on the Philippine Island of Mindanao, I wore many hats. I held the job of Mess Officer, Signal Repair Officer, Technical Intelligence and Branch Exchange (PX) Officer.

This is a story about one of the experiences I had as the PX Officer for the 24th Signal Company. The 24th Signal Company set up camp about 10 miles from Davao City. Davao City was placed off limits because of its large population of Japanese civilian citizens and the Japanese army was still in the area. However, I was given a special pass, which allowed me to enter Davao City. Riding through the outskirts of Davao City with my driver, I saw a building with a sign over the door, "CUSTODIAN OF ENEMY PROPERTY". It looked interesting so we stopped and went inside. Sitting at a desk was an army officer who introduced himself as Lt. Sahakian. We hit it off right away as Lt. Sahakian came from Dorchester, Mass and I from Cambridge, Mass. As we were talking, a sergeant came in and asked Lt. Sahakian to sign a requisition for 50 pounds of ice. My antenna went up because we were getting our first beer ration in a couple of days and it would be great to serve ICE COLD BEER to the troops. Lt. Sahakian said that he had a radio that was not working and wondered if my radio repairmen could fix it. Of course, I said, it would be nice if you can give me a requisition for ice in return. After some haggling, I was given the document that would allow us to get the ice. I was also given directions how to get to the icehouse. On the outskirts of Davao City, we saw a group of Filipinos in an open field watching a cock fight. What I remember of that event was the fighting cocks cutting each other to ribbons. When we returned to camp, I told the noncom who worked at the PX to clean and paint two 55gallon drums for the ice and beer. At first, he did not believe that we were getting ice but my driver who witnessed my conversation with Lt. Sahakian convinced him. When the beer ration arrived at our PX, my driver and I, armed with our carbine rifle and a bar of tropical chocolate were off to get our precious cargo, ICE! Although we had our carbines, riding along the deserted road to the icehouse made me nervous. It was a long ride and we encountered no traffic. I informed my driver that when we arrived at the icehouse, I would do all the talking and

that he selects the largest piece of ice and quickly put it in the back of the jeep. I gave the manager of the icehouse the requisition and the bar of tropical chocolate but he was not too happy because we took such a large piece of ice. When we returned to camp, we headed for the PX tent to deposit the ice. There were two newly painted 55 gallon drums, one at each end of the PX tent waiting for the ice that will cool the beer. In addition, there was a banner across the top front of the tent that read: "ICE COLD BEER"

COMPLIMENTS OF THE MAN FROM BOSTON

This expression of appreciation by the troops was much appreciated by me; it was a nice feeling. After lunch, each soldier received four bottles of ice-cold beer on a day that was very hot and humid. Later, while walking through the company area, I saw a couple of soldiers who appeared to be drunk. I asked them, how can you get drunk on beer with only 3.2% alcohol? They laughed and said, "Lieutenant, do you want a drink of TUBA?" TUBA is an alcoholic drink prepared from juice that has been collected from coconut trees. No, I did not drink TUBA. Several weeks later, I was telling my infantry officer friend Lt. Jim Eigler about the icehouse. He said, "Are you nuts? Our infantry unit considered it dangerous and warned us not to go there. Jim said, the Filipinos supplied ice to the Americans during the day and the Japs ice at night". I then realized why the road to the icehouse had no traffic. Needless to say, I never went there again. Another way that soldiers cooled beer is to put a bottle of beer in a sock, soak it with gasoline, and then twirl it over your head until the gasoline evaporates.

Edward Shakalis

Edward Shakalis is a retired Electrical Engineer and a ham radio operator. He and his son Rick ran "The Lithuanian Open" golf tournament.

bridges

Bridges would like to thank the Lithuanian Foundation for their generous grant. Their generosity helps to keep costs down and permits us to reach more readers around the country and around the world.

For more information about the foundation and its work please visit:

www.lithuanianfoundations.org

Calendar of Events for September - October - November, 2008

Please verify all events as placed 23rd times are subject to change.

SEPTEMBER

Sept. 7, 2008 - 3 pm

Location Change
Our Lady of Siluva 400 Years
St. Andrew's Church
396 Church St.
New Britain, CT
His Excellence,
Archbishop Henry Mansell
Principal celebrant & homilist
All are invited to attend
Info: Contact BetteAnn
860-223-2380.

Sept. 14, 2008 - 10:30 am

Mass of Thanksgiving of the
400th Anniversary of Our Lady's
appearance at Siluva, Lithuania.
Celebrant: His Eminence
Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.
Nativity B.V.M. Parish
6812 South Washtenaw Ave.
Chicago, IL 60629
The celebratory Banquet at
3:00pm - Oak Lawn Hilton.
Tickets \$45.00, available from
Mary Beth Stakis, 708-342-1093
Nativity B.V.M. Rectory
Info: 773 - 776 - 4600
Sr. Johanna Marie Shainauskas
Rev. Anthony Markus, Pastor
rob.martin@arcwww.com
All are invited.

Sept. 16, 2008 - 7pm to 9pm

Lithuanian Heritage
Club Meeting
Lithuanian Music Hall
2715 E. Allegheny Ave.
Philadelphia, PA.
Use side door on Tilton St.
Info: Millie Helt 610-497-5469

Sept. 18, 2008 (Thursday)

Autumn Gala

Sisters of St. Francis of the
Providence of God
3603 McRoberts Road *
Pittsburgh, PA
Dinner, Hospitality reception,
silent auction and basket raffle
RSVP 412 - 885 - 7232
Info: www.osfprov.org

Sept. 21, 2008

400th Anniversary of
Our Lady of Siluva
Saints Peter & Paul Lithuanian
Romain Catholic Church
211 Ripley Place
Elizabeth, New Jersey 07206
Holy Mass & Procession:
11:00 a.m. Concelebrants:
Rev. Krzysztof Szczotka, S.D.S.
and Rev. Daniel Staniskis
Celebration Luncheon follows
in Saints Peter & Paul Parish
hall 216 Ripley Place
Elizabeth, New Jersey 07206
Purchase \$20.00 tickets
before Sept.10
For tickets and info, call
SS. Peter & Paul's rectory
Telephone 908-352-2271

Sept. 27, 2008 - 7:30 pm

Concert - Dainius Vaicekonis
with Bremerton Symphony will
perform Tchaikovsky Piano
Concert No.1
Bremerton High School
Bremerton, WA

OCTOBER

Oct. 4 - 5, 2008 - 11am-5pm
Los Angeles Lithuanian Fair
Admission: Adults - \$8.00
Seniors - \$6.00
Children under 12 - Free
St. Casimir's Parish Grounds

2718 St. George Street,
Los Angeles, CA 90027
Lithuanian artistic, historic and
cultural heritage, as expressed
through a variety of forms such
as Art, Music, Literature, Ethnic
Dance, Native Folk Dances and
other activities. The Lithuanian
Fair provides variety and a
great time for all guests and
participants.
Info: <http://www.losangeleslb.com>

October 4, 2008 - 2:00pm - ???

Svente/Fall Fest
Bear Creek Pioneers Park
3535 War Memorial Drive
Houston TX 77084
Pavilion # 5 Please bring food
& drinks for yourself & enough
to share with 4 more people.
LACH will provide dishes,
utensils and cups. There will be
a barbecue pit so please bring
charcoal and skewers if you
plan to use it. Sponsor:
Lithuanian American
Community-Houston

OCTOBER

October 10, 11 & 12, 2008

12th Lithuanian
Theater Festival
Lithuanian Youth Center
5600 S. Claremont Ave.
Chicago, IL 60636-1039
Lithuanian language
theater is alive in the U.S.
Every four years, the LAC
Cultural Council celebrates
Lithuanian American theatrical
activity by sponsoring a
Lithuanian Theater Festival.
The 12th Lithuanian
Festival was scheduled for the

capital of American theater,
New York, but plans have
changed & the 2008 Festival
will once again be held in
Chicago, capital of the
Lithuanian American theater.
Six Lithuanian theater groups
have registered to participate in
the Festival. They are from
Chicago, Los Angeles, Florida,
Detroit and Toronto.
Special event! Saturday

Oct. 11, 2008

Saturday, afternoon
"The Emperor's New Clothes"
by the Lithuanian
children's theater from Toronto.
Info: Dale Lukas, Chair LAC
Cultural Affairs Council
301598-8657
dalelukas@verizon.net

Oct. 11-12, 2008

St. George Parish Celebrates
Saturday - reception & banquet
Rochester Convention Center

Sunday -

Solemn Mass 12:00 noon
St. George Church
545 Hudson Ave.
Rochester, New York, 14605
Info: Ms. Birute Litvins,
Chairperson, Steering
Committee, at 585-342-9468
janinabrute@aol.com

October 11, 2008 - 6:00 pm

Annual Fall Ball
Saturday - Marine Corps Air
Station Officer's Club,
Miramar, San Diego
<http://www.lithsd.org>

Oct. 12, 2008

Our Lady of Siluva 400th

Anniversary 10:30 am Mass
Principal Celebrant will be
His Eminence Cardinal
Justin Rigali, Archbishop of
Philadelphia
St. Andrew's Lithuanian Church
1913 Wallace St.
Philadelphia, PA. 19130

Oct. 25, 2008 - 6:00 pm

ST. MARTIN'S EVE
celebration of all three Baltic
nations of the Baltic equivalent
of Halloween. Proceeds will
benefit the Baltic Studies
Program at the University of
Washington. Come in costume
and enjoy a fun-filled family
evening of music, entertainment
and dancing. Admission will
include a dinner of pork,
potatoes and sauerkraut.
A no-host bar will feature wine
and a selection of Baltic beers.
Info: <http://seattle.litviuviu-bendruomene.org/events.html>

NOVEMBER

Nov. 1-2, 2008 - Noon to 6pm
"MUGE" Lithuanian Festival
Entertainment, Lithuanian dancing & music, Lithuanian food, arts, crafts & many vendors
Lithuanian Music Hall
2715 E. Allegheny Ave
Philadelphia, PA. 19134
Info: 215-739-4831

Nov. 27-30, 2008

The Fourteenth World
Lithuanian Symposium
on Arts and Sciences
will take place over the
Thanksgiving Day
weekend in Lemont, Illinois

bridges

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September 1 - Labor Day
September 8 - Our Lady of Šiluva, 400th Anniversary