

# bridges



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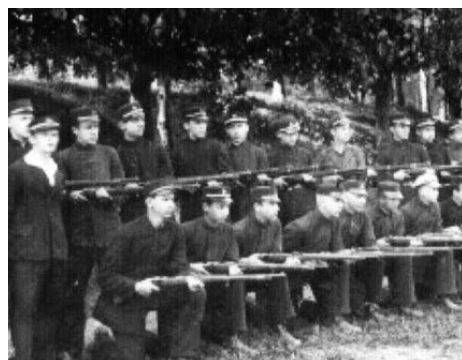


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Front Cover: Young Lithuanians of the Lithuanian American Community Colorado Chapter participate in the commemoration of the January 13th events

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EDITOR  
Karilė Vaitkutė

ART DIRECTOR  
Daniel P. Craig, Jr.

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR, CURRENT EVENTS  
Alan J. Stankus, P.E. (ret)

ADVERTISING & SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER  
Marius Naris

**Editorial Office**  
139 Willow Blvd., Willow Springs, IL 60480  
kariledalia@yahoo.com

**Subscriber Services and Advertising**  
spauda@javlb.org

**Facebook**  
facebook.com/BridgesLithuanianAmericanMagazine



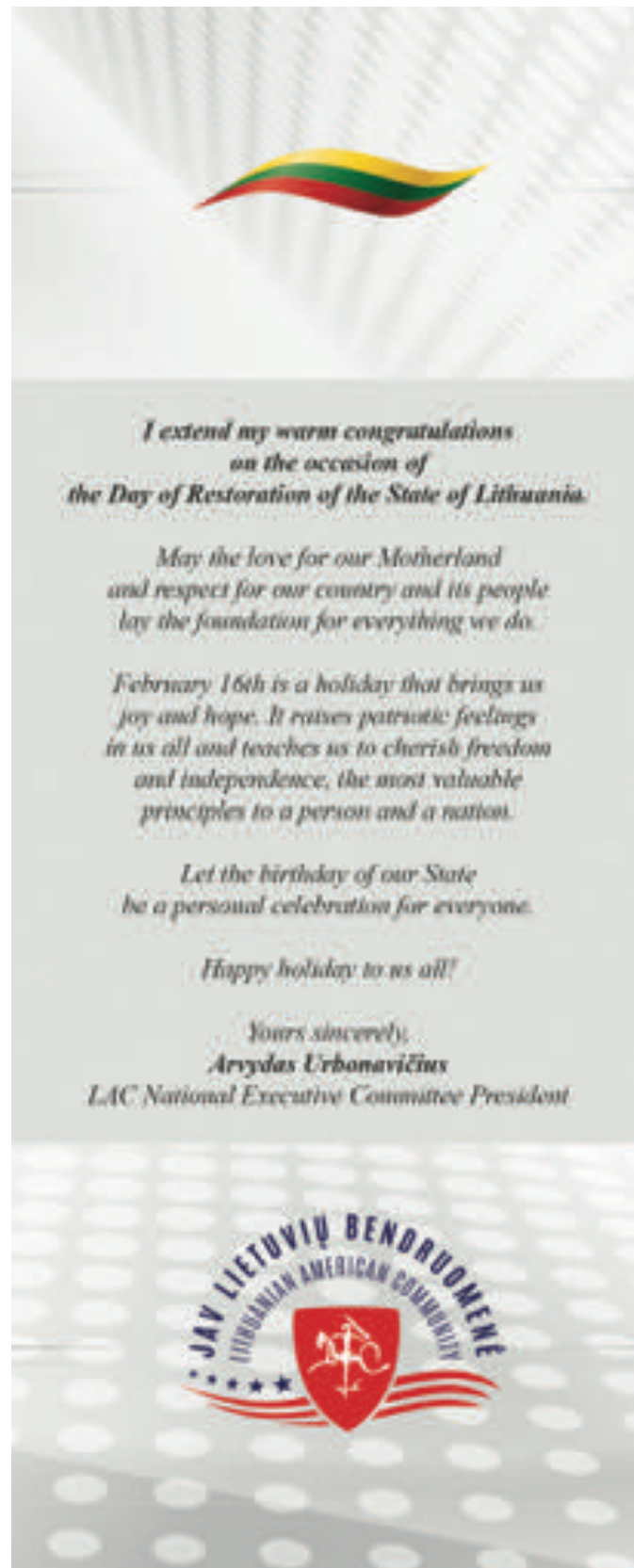
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finansai@javlb.org

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from the editor



*I extend my warm congratulations  
on the occasion of  
the Day of Restoration of the State of Lithuania.*

*May the love for our Motherland  
and respect for our country and its people  
lay the foundation for everything we do.*

*February 16th is a holiday that brings us  
joy and hope. It raises patriotic feelings  
in us all and teaches us to cherish freedom  
and independence, the most valuable  
principles to a person and a nation.*

*Let the birthday of our State  
be a personal celebration for everyone.*

*Happy holiday to us all!*

*Yours sincerely,  
Arvydas Urbonavičius  
LAC National Executive Committee President*



# Lithuanian is Among the 100 Strongest Languages of the World

Interview with Habilitated  
Doctor of Philology  
Giedrius Subačius  
by Ugnius Antanavičius



Prof. Giedrius Subačius, Endowed Chair in Lithuanian Studies, School of Literatures, Cultural Studies and Linguistics, University of Illinois at Chicago

The Lithuanian language is particularly ancient and unique, and it must be protected and preserved. Many of us have heard this statement, and we rarely think about what it is based on and what is so unique about the Lithuanian language. What makes the Lithuanian language unique from a linguistic point of view? When did it originate and how did it develop? If we were transported back in time, would we be able to communicate with Vytautas the Great? Should Samogitian be considered a dialect or a language? Professor Giedrius Subačius, who teaches at the University of Illinois and has been researching the history of the Lithuanian language for several decades, answered questions about the history and future of the Lithuanian language. He spoke about when the Lithuanian language came into being, why its future is not as bleak as the pessimists like to think, and why he wouldn't mind if the inhabitants of Panevėžys started declaring their dialect a language.

**Lithuanians like to boast that the Lithuanian language is particularly archaic, the oldest Indo-European language. French linguist Antoine Meillet is often quoted as saying that anyone who wants to hear how the Indo-Europeans spoke should go and listen to a Lithuanian peasant. How valid scientifically are such statements?**

It is both true and false. There is certainly some truth in such statements, but from a linguistics perspective, we look at the issue a little differently. Some parts of the Lithuanian language, some aspects, are very old. But not the whole language as such. After all, if the whole language was old, it would be dead. But we have new words for things that simply did not exist in the past. For example, the word 'kava' (coffee) that names the drink we now drink, is very new compared to many others. The statement "Lithuanian is the oldest language" is a simplification of reality, because languages contain both, very old things and very new things. This is how languages live. When we say that Lithuanian is the oldest Indo-European language, we are referring just to its certain aspects. For example, let's take the diphthong -an. The exam-

ple I like is that we have the word 'ranka' (hand). The Ukrainians have 'ruka', the Poles have 'renka'. They are related, but which is the oldest? Is it the Lithuanian -an, the Polish -en, or the East Slavic -u? Linguists have reconstructed that -an is the oldest. Our diphthong is unchanged, while other related languages have changed a little over the centuries. As for the peasants, you can listen to them, but there are nuances here too. Let's say, for example, that Suvalkians say 'ranka'. In eastern Lithuania, the diphthong has already changed, and they will say 'runka'. And the Samogitians will say 'ronka'. Not all dialects are the same. So, again, it is a simplification to talk about the whole Lithuanian language. Because, after all, its dialects are spoken in different ways. It is just that this form with -an has entered the common language. But, after all, we could have chosen another dialect to form the basis for the common language.

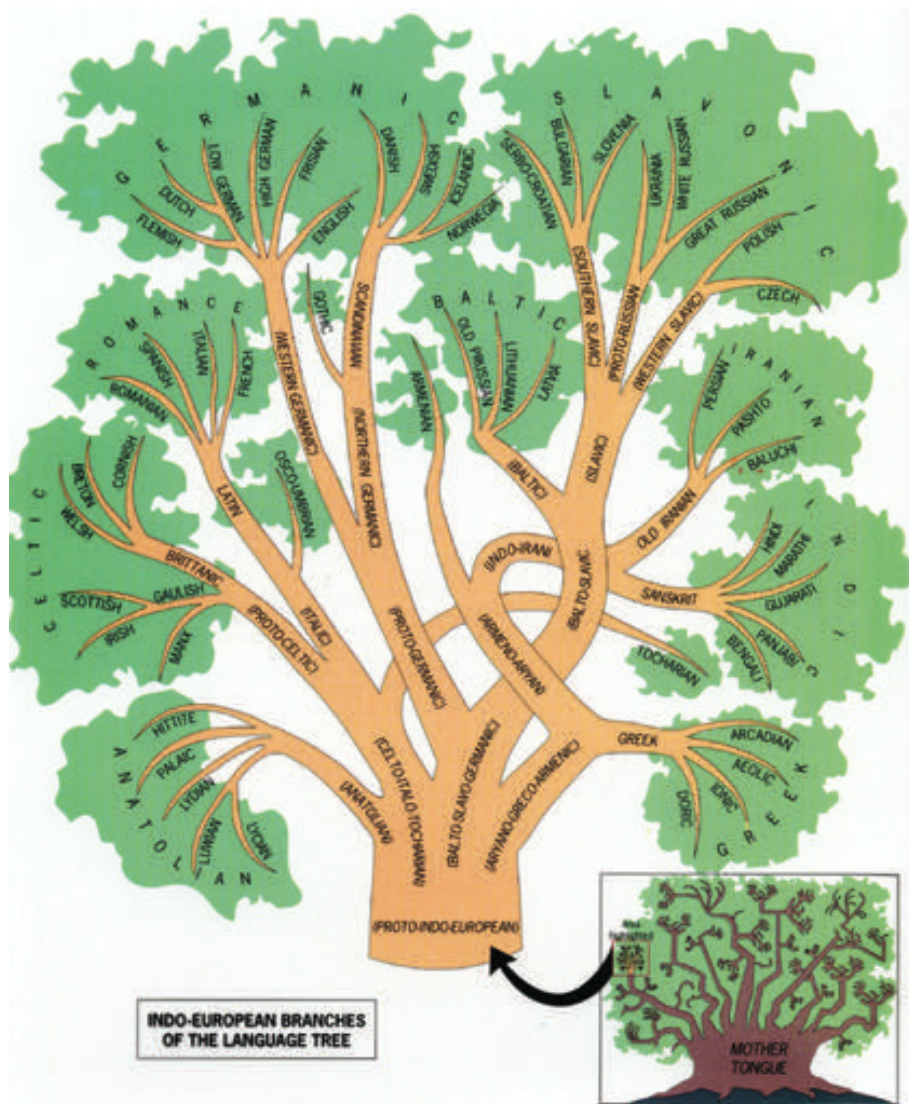
**Could you give any other examples of archaic Lithuanian language features?**

Let's say, the case system. We have seven cases. Latin has five. Sanskrit has eight. And more modern languages that have changed more, like English or French, don't have any cases at all. You could say that Russian has cases too. But in Latin, for example, the ending of the Accusative case is -an. And in Lithuanian, the ending used to be pronounced through the nose, too. It was not "mama myliu" (I love my mother) but "maman myliu". This means that the endings of our Accusative and the Latin Accusative are the same. This is no longer the case in many other languages.

**And is it true that Lithuanian and Sanskrit have words in common, despite their geographical distance?**

Yes, they do. It's just that when we talk about the similarities between distant languages, we need to understand that languages forget words. It is said that in seven thousand years, everything changes in a language. But when we compare Lithuanian with Sanskrit we find words that

have not been forgotten in four or five thousand years in our language. And we can compare them. For example, "honey" and "son" sound similar in Lithuanian and Sanskrit. Such fundamental words, which have been needed for generations, have not been forgotten. Even 'Dievas' (God) in Sanskrit sounds similar to ours. Such words exist. But, of course, such words as, for example, 'cukrine' (sugar bowl) will no longer be a common word. Unfortunately, we do not have the means to compare how it was spoken in even older times, 15 thousand years ago, 30 thousand years ago. People invented writing 6-8 thousand years ago. And archaeology does not leave us any data on language. So we can only speculate. One more thing. There is a term in linguistics - dialect continuum. If you look at a dozen or so geographically neighboring regions, you will often find that, if you look at them one by one, they will all communicate with their neighbors. But the inhabitants of the most distant and closest areas do not. This is



The Indo-European language family tree (this image also could be quite big so it would be possible to read)



Map of dialects spoken in Lithuania (the image could be big so readers could read the names, it could take half a page or so)

also the case in the Lithuanian language. Everyone says we are a small country. But if there were no common language, it would be difficult for the Samogitians from Skuodas to communicate with a resident of Ignalina. I have been on an expedition to Eastern Aukštaitija, and during the expedition, the Aukštaitija people complained that their son had found a Samogitian daughter-in-law and that they could not communicate with her parents. They said that it was difficult to agree on specific things for the wedding because they simply did not understand each other's dialect. And they don't know the standard language well enough. That's the difference. Samogitians and Highlanders lived side by side for a long time, but in isolation, without traveling or mixing. This has created big differences even within the same language.

**And when did the Lithuanian language come into existence? Separate from, say, Latvian or Prussian?**

It is thought that Latvian and Lithuanian separated around the 6th and 7th centuries. Once upon a time, there was historically one Indo-European language, and then the Baltic protolanguage separated, and then it split into Western and Eastern Baltic, and then there was another split, and instead of the Eastern Baltic protolanguage, there were two separate languages - Latvian and Lithuanian. Whenever I say 'Indo-Europeans', 'Balts' or 'Eastern Balts', imagine that I am referring to separate languages with many dialects. There was no common, standard Baltic language. There were a bunch of dialects but people still were able to communicate.

### **And how did scholars determine the time that the language emerged?**

Good question. There is a methodology for calculating the age of a language from the evolution of words. You take a thousand or so foundational words, like 'sūnus' (son) or 'dukra' (daughter), and see how much they change over 100 years. This is like trying to calculate the rate at which language changes. They also look at certain grammatical features that characterize Latvian or Lithuanian. But we have to realize that, in any case, we will only get assumptions. Without written examples, which unfortunately we do not have, we cannot say for sure.

### **How much has the language changed since the Middle Ages? Would a present-day Lithuanian, transported back in time, be able to communicate with Grand Duke Vytautas?**

Well, any answer to this question is again a simplification of reality. Let's say, for example, that you now go and talk to some dialect-speaking Anykščiai man. Will you understand everything? Perhaps you will understand a lot, but not everything. So what does it mean to "communicate"? Is it to understand every word, or 80% of the language, or 50%? We do not have a universal way of measuring how much you understood me and how much you did not. People want straight, easy answers. Life is always more complicated. Communication is not just about understanding verbal language. I know, for example, a case where a Belarusian and a Lithuanian called each other good friends even though they did not know each other's language. They communicated with gestures, with expressions of their eyes. And, for example, if we were to take you and, say, a Japanese person. Even if you don't know each other's language at all, at least you will understand each other in certain situations. Through gestures, glances, movements, and so on, communication will happen. After all, we are all human. But still, to try to answer the question, Vytautas apparently spoke in the Eastern Highland Vilnius dialect. So, in principle, I think we should be able to communicate with him. But, of course, there would be a lot of strange things in Vytautas's speech, incomprehensible words. I don't know how close you are to the Eastern Highland dialect.

### **I'm from Panevėžys.**

Well, then you should understand a bit. The language would sound strange, there would be a lot of unfamiliar words, but it would hardly be incomprehensible. But it would certainly not be the case that you would understand everything. One more aspect. Would it be easy

for you, a Highlander, to understand a dialect-speaking Samogitian from Skuodas or Luokė? Probably there will be difficulties. After all, Vytautas the Great's father, Kęstutis, was a duke of Samogitia. What if Vytautas also spoke a dialect closer to Samogitian? We simply do not know. We can only speculate that it would probably be possible to communicate with Vytautas in principle. And you would understand him quite well. Much better than you would understand a Latvian person now.

### **What makes us say "Samogitian dialect" rather than "Samogitian language"? What is the difference between a dialect and a language?**

It is a serious and good question. The distinction between dialect and language can be understood in two ways. One interpretation is the traditional, old-fashioned one: if I understand you, then we speak the same language. Only the dialects may be different. But if I don't understand you, your language is already different. That's all. It's a simple, intuitive principle. It doesn't even require writing to understand it. For tens of thousands of years, people have felt, have known: if I don't understand him, then he's a stranger, he's speaking a strange language. But in the modern world, especially in Europe, another, political definition of language has emerged and taken root. It comes from the view that language and the state are linked, that one's language is an essential feature of the state. In Europe, many states are historically linked to a particular language. For example, Poland has the Polish language. Germany has German. The language of such states is the fundamental way in which the population identifies itself with the state, with the political community. There are only a few exceptions in Europe, like Switzerland or Luxembourg. What does this mean? That language is no longer defined by linguistic but by political aspects. Let's say a Dane, a Norwegian and a Swede can understand one another. Therefore, traditionally speaking, we should say that they speak one language. But that modern perception says that if Danes perceive themselves as Danes precisely through their speech, then they have the Danish language that is different from Swedish. It doesn't matter that they can understand one another's language, or that they can speak a language. What does this mean? That language is no longer defined by linguistic but by political aspects. Let's say a Dane, a Norwegian, and a Swede can communicate with each other. Therefore, traditionally speaking, we should say that they speak one language. But that modern perception says that if Danes perceive themselves as Danes precisely through their speech, then they have the Danish language that is different from Swedish. It doesn't matter that they communicate. The former Yugoslavia is also a good example.



Vytautas the Great

It had Serbo-Croatian. Now Serbian is spoken in Serbia and Croatian in Croatia. Even though Serbs and Croats are still able to understand one another very well. But politically, they have the right to have their language.

And I respect it. This is a modern approach. So, when somebody makes fun of the fact that Serbs and Croats understand each other, but still says that they speak separate languages, he is applying that traditional linguistic principle of intelligibility-unintelligibility. And when the other person replies that everything is fine here because Serbs and Croats themselves seem to speak different languages, he is applying the modern political principle of self-definition. Both principles are valid. They are both valuable and correct in their own way. That is why the question of whether something is a dialect or a language can be answered in two ways. And that is why we often get confused. But once you understand both approaches and their nuances, you can look at it either way. Coming back to Samogitians, the linguist Juozas Pabrėža from Šiauliai University has recently published a book on the Samogitian language in which he tries to argue that it is a language. But that does not need to be proven linguistically. Every dialect is a language. Every language is a dialect. In principle, it is the same. The difference is political - how you look at it politically. What your political identity is. Every dialect is a language. Every language is a dialect. People often perceive "dialect" as inferior to language. Saying "Samogitian dialect" is like saying that it is somehow inferior. After all, it is much nicer to be called a language. There is more prestige to it. And so people who have a clearly expressed political identity, which is also linked to speaking, want their dialect to be called a language. For example, the Latgalians in Latvia. They have long considered themselves to be somewhat culturally different from Latvians. In the interwar period, the Latgalian language was taught in schools. And now many of them are fighting for the Latgalian dialect to be considered a language, separate from Latvian. Samogitians have never been so culturally and politically independent. Although there was once Duchy of Samogitia, in recent centuries Samogitians have never claimed a separate political identity. They did not want to create their own state. Many Samogitians have a Lithuanian identity, they perceive themselves as Lithuanians. From a democratic point of view, every dialect can be allowed to call itself whatever it wants. Let there be Anykščiai language. Or Panevėžys language. What can I, an outsider, say? Do whatever you want. The most important thing is that you, Panevėžys people, have to want it yourselves. Feel that you speak a separate language. If Panevėžys people start calling their dialect a language, it will be their political decision. It is not a question of similarity with the Lithuanian language. I will add: if the people of Panevėžys decide to make their language a language, I will be happy. From a linguistic perspective, I will feel good about it. Because they will be much more protective of their traditional dialect by calling it a language. Because they will realize that their



language is no less beautiful than the one spoken from Vilnius on TV. After all, sometimes people think that way. "We speak ugly here, not like in Vilnius on TV." And so the dialect will have a chance to have a longer, more stable life. It will become part of modern culture, not just traditional speech.

**And one last question: as I began, I will end with a common Lithuanian perception of their language. Many people think and say that the Lithuanian language should be preserved, that borrowings should be avoided, because it has been influenced by the Russian language for a long time, and now it is being influenced by the English language, and it is in danger. What is the future of the Lithuanian language?**

I think that the future of the Lithuanian language has never been as good as it is now. I know that some think differently. But some people seem to feel insecure in this world, so they adopt this attitude of exaggerated fear. They feel it dangerous to leave home, to visit a neighboring country. They sit at home and think that their perspective is the right one. But if we look at it more objectively, there is a website called Ethnologue.com, whose researchers specifically record the viability of languages. All seven thousand and some languages in the world. And they update it every year. And so, according to them, Lithuanian is one of the 100 strongest languages in the world. We think there are so few of us, Lithuanians. Only three million. But the point is not the number. The point is that our language is institutionalized. What does that mean? It means that it is the language of the state, the language of universities, the language of schools, the language of the European Union. It has all the characteristics of strength. And what is more important is that our children want to speak the language. It is not the case that your son will start speaking English, Russian, or Japanese. This is only in exceptional cases. In Lithuania, new generations are adopting that language. That is what defines the vitality of a language. And I didn't come up with it - a large international team of researchers has assessed it. Think about it, only a third of languages have writing systems. Writing helps to convey cultural value. So I don't think borrowings are to be feared. There are no languages without borrowings. And borrowings can be looked at from the other side. Why can't a loanword be a synonym that enriches the language? And what is the Lithuanian language in general? Is it the prestigious, formal language, or is it the Russian loanwords that are being pushed out unsuccessfully, or is it the new words that have come from English? They all are our language and they all exist side by side. In ten years, their relationship will be dif-

ferent, the Lithuanian language will be different. We do not know what it will be. Language changes, it is a living organism. It is ridiculous to put up artificial fences - supposedly the language will be alive if we protect it from some words. The language will be alive as long as we want to use it. That's all. What we use it for is secondary. It is your business. Take swearing. If you think it is normal to swear in public, you can. Why do linguists have to react in any way to that? It would be your problem if you do not act adequately in the situation. But when you are driving alone and another driver pulls in front of you with his car and you swear to yourself, you are relieved. Swearing has its function. Swearwords are needed but in unpleasant situations, not formal ones. Gitanas Nausėda does not swear during his inaugural speech and we would be very surprised if he did. Language has different layers. And we are constantly choosing between them. With me, you speak one way, with your friends another, with your family maybe another. And it's all in Lithuanian. And its life is that we want to speak it. statements?

*The interview was printed in Lithuanian in the 15min.lt website. It was translated into English by Karilė Vaitkutė*

**Giedrius Subačius** is a Professor and Director of the Endowed Chair in Lithuanian Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago (US). Subačius's primary scholarly interests are historical sociolinguistics, development of standard languages, history of linguistic thought, history of orthography, and history of the Lithuanian language and Lithuanian immigration to the US. He has prepared and published several critical editions of the 19th century Lithuanian linguistic manuscripts, and his monographs include: "Ideas about Standard Lowland Lithuanian: Beginning of the Nineteenth Century" (1998); "Kalikstas Kasakauskis: Juncture of Standard Lithuanian" (2001); "Upton Sinclair: The Lithuanian Jungle" (2006); "The Experts of Lithuanian in Service of the Russian Empire" (2011); "Simonas Daukantas's Rīga Orthography (1827–1834)" (2018), and "Simonas Daukantas's St Petersburg Orthography (1834–1846)" (2021). Subačius is the founder and editor of the annual scholarly journal of Lithuanian historical sociolinguistics "Archivum Lithuanicum" (vols. 1–22, 1999–present). He has initiated the creation of the database of private Lithuanian letters, diaries, notebooks, etc. ([www.musulaiskai.lt](http://www.musulaiskai.lt)). Subačius was awarded several important awards by the governmental institutions of the Republic of Lithuania, Simonas Daukantas Award 1995, Kazimieras Būga Award 1999, National Award for Scholars Working Abroad 2009 and 2019, and Lituanius Journal Award 2005 among them.

# Memoirs of an Ordinary Lithuanian, Jonas Venckus

Translated from original handwritten notes by Roland Giedraitis



Graduating class of police cadets from the Higher Police School in 1930. Jonas Venckus is at the lower-left corner, identified by arrows

## Part 3

**Preface:** Jonas was delighted to be assigned as precinct chief of Varėna, but he faced problems. There was open hostility with the local powers, crime, and tensions with Poland. Then WWII started. All this was the background for his romance with his future wife, Bronė.

When I took over as police precinct chief from G. I found there was a lot of animosity with the local powers. The previous chief did not get along with Varėna's 5th zone border chief K. In general, he did not get along with the school director R. who was also the leader of *šauliai* (1). He

also did not get along with the head of the county administration, the pastor, and others.

The chief of police in Alytus, Mr. Kondrackis, warned me to be sure to establish a good rapport with the local and border police. Thus, as soon as I took over the precinct, I started to socialize and get acquainted with visits to the pastor, the school director, the post office director, the forester, the directors of sanitariums, and the representative of the Jewish community Mr. Kacas, who was also the director of the carton factory. They all had different viewpoints and criticized one another. It was difficult for me to remain neutral. But little by little, tensions eased.

There was an unsuccessful coup d'état in the summer of 1934 by the *voldemarininkai* (2). After the putsch's fail-

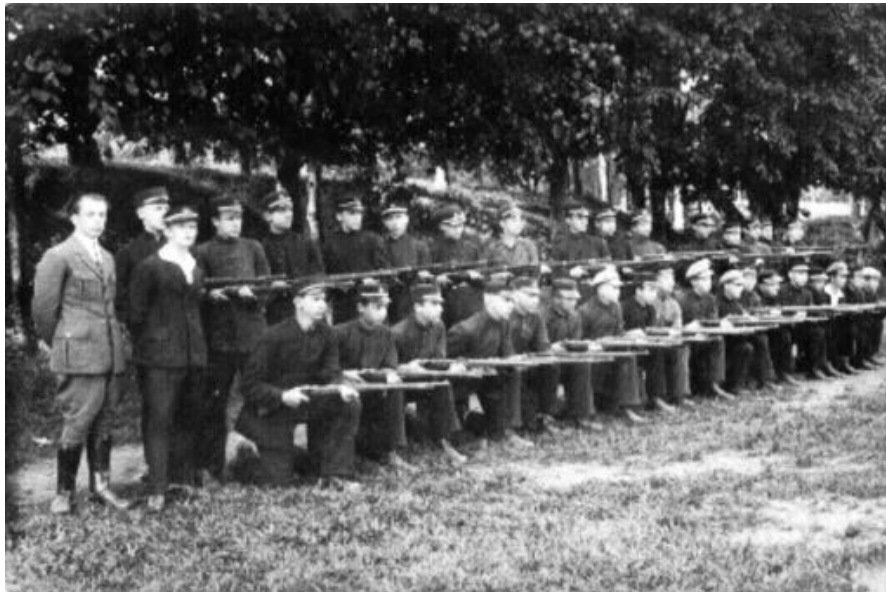
ure, there was immediate dismissal of the post office director and the for-ester. Later the district director Mr. Kirlys was also dismissed because he was an ally of Voldemaras. In their place, younger, friendlier officials were appointed with whom I became friends. I became like a godfather to all since I tried to be impartial. A community leader in Varėna was the director of the school and a commander of the *šauliai*, Mr. Ryliškis. Due to his diligence and initiative, a beautiful edifice was built for the *šauliai*, which positively enhanced the shabby area of Varėna. I got along well with the TB sanitarium's director Dr. Grigaitis and the controller of the accounts for the hospital Mr. Jonas Bagdonavičius and his wife, who later became the godmother of our son Romas. Peace was established with the local powers, and success against crimes and robberies was achieved. It so happened that almost 100% of robberies and other major crimes were solved.

The Perloja village was outstanding during the wars of independence, but later it became known as a nest of crimes and a school for pickpockets. The school's director was Mr. Ikasala, known as Kaklalis. 25 persons from Perloja were sentenced for assault and robberies and other major crimes. The precinct chiefs nicknamed me as the third incorporator of Perloja in the prison of Marijampolė, where later I was sentenced. But about that, I will write later.

I felt very well established in my duties and was commended by my superiors. I started to think of establishing my own family. From many that I met, I decided on Bronė Vasiliauskaitė from the village of Ramongaliai near Vabalninkas.

I first met Bronė in 1925 in Panevėžys at a teacher training college along with her cousins Genė and Janė. At their school, they organized dances and other activities. I was 18, and the girls were 13-14 years old. Bronė was slim, modest, and danced well. I did not see Bronytė again until 1935 when I visited Ramongaliai again. I was invited to her home, where we all sang, joked, danced, and enjoyed beer.

After those visits, I could not forget Bronė's demeanor and her sense of humor. After another meeting, I confessed that I was in love with her and wanted to marry her. Thus on October 29, 1936, we exchanged vows. After four days of wedding feasting, I brought my Bronytė to Varėna, where the *šauliai* orchestra greeted us festively with march music.



A platoon of *šauliai* in Panevėžys, 1927

At first, it was sad for Bronė with all these foreign *Dzūkai* people, but soon she had a new worry. Something was not right in her abdomen. In the meantime, in July of 1937, I was sent to the police continuing education class for



Jonas Venckus and his bride Bronė Vasiliauskaitė, October 29, 1936



Location of Varėna within contemporary Lithuania

a course called “police prosecutor.” The course was four months long. This was to learn to strengthen police laws and to successfully represent the state in courts. At the end of this course, Bronė found herself in Kaunas with birthing problems. Under the care of Dr. Mažylis in a hospital was born Romualdas Rustutis Romas. The three of us returned from Kaunas. We celebrated with a festive christening ceremony inviting our new Varėna friends. After a year and a half, another son, Jonas Laimutis, was born in Varėna and then another christening but not as festive since Lithuania was threatened by Poland and Germany. The Klaipėda region was torn away from us.

### The Polish Ultimatum

In March of 1938, in the territory of Merkinė in Lithuania, a Polish border policeman was shot. From this incident, the Polish government demanded that Lithuania establish diplomatic relations (3).

The senior commissioner of Alytus district was empowered to meet with the governor of Vilnius in Varėna, on the Lithuanian side of the border. Because the meeting was planned for noon, the commissioner wanted to have a luncheon in Varėna. I was asked to organize this luncheon. Because Varėna did not have a single decent restaurant, my wife Bronė agreed to host the luncheon in our apartment in the *šauliai* building, where we also had the police office. There were ten participants: four Polish delegates with the governor leading, four Lithuanians with the county commissioner leading, and, well, my wife and I.

From the local fishermen, we obtained some good pikes and from the butcher, a great piece of beef ham. With the help of our servant, a decent lunch was cooked with extras such as Lithuanian vodka. At first, both the Poles and the Lithuanians were a bit reluctant, but our commissioner was very adept and liked to drink. Soon, toasts were being proclaimed for Polish and Lithuanian friend-

ship, but the Polish governor was toasting for a union of Polish and Lithuanian states while we toasted for the return of Vilnius. After numerous friendly toasts, we said goodbye to each other. The respective chauffeurs were pressed to help the tipsy guests navigate from the second story to their autos.

## The Second World War

On September 1, 1939, Hitler ordered Germany to attack Poland. We were very close to the Polish border, so we could feel the events of the war. German bombers crossed the border and bombed the Varėna railroad station and the railroad. We were afraid that the German pilots would not make a mistake and start bombing us. After two weeks of war and after the Russian attack from the east, the Polish government capitulated (4).

We had an agreement with Kaunas that the entire Polish garrison in Vilnius would march through Varėna as internees. But at the last moment, the Polish soldiers and noncoms refused to retreat through Varėna and went through the direction of Merkinė. But the garrison staff and officers did go through Varėna, through the Merkinė bridge where they were disarmed by Lithuanian authorities. A detachment of Lithuanian uhlans was dispatched from Alytus to escort the Polish internees to Alytus, then to Suvalkų Kalvarija. The Vilnius garrison troops and noncoms were interned in the Merkinė area.

Thus so, Polish greatness and pride disappeared. After a couple of hours on the Merkinė bridge appeared the ragged and tired Russian soldiers sent by the shining sun of Stalin!

## The Return of Vilnius

After long negotiations with Stalin, the Vilnius region was returned to Lithuania. Policemen and regional police commanders from all over Lithuania congregated to Varėna since they were needed to occupy the Eišiškės region.

In the *šauliai* edifice next to my office in the library, the regional commander established his office. The telephone and office materials were requisitioned so that my normal office routine was impossible. The Russians procrastinated the return of Vilnius for over a week. Nobody knew the time of the turnover, and everybody was nervous. Only the Jews of Varėna and pigs were happy because this was big business. The farmers let the pigs roam the streets and mix with people. It was strange for the arriving police to watch the boar-type pigs mix with people. Then for us, the natives, it was shameful for this disorder, and we felt bad because there was nothing we could do about it. The Varėna police detachment was dispersed. In the



Jonas Venckus, his wife Bronė, Bronė's mother, Paulina, and their firstborn son, Romas, 1937

meantime, I was promoted to go to Simnas with similar duties while my two policemen were ordered to report to Eišiškės.

## Russian Bases in Lithuania

The Russians did return the Vilnius territory with the stipulation that the Lithuanian government would admit 20,000 troops to their country. About half of that army entered Lithuania through Varėna. The Alytus powers informed us when the Russian army would arrive. In the evening of the day of arrival, we heard the clatter of motors, and maybe for an hour without stopping, we heard noisy Russian trucks which were occupied with ten soldiers. We heard that cacophony for half a day and all night. They did not stop in Varėna since the uhlans barracks of Alytus were consigned to the Russians, while the uhlans themselves were sent to the borderlands of Vilnius. All of us, with great sorrow, accepted this fate. Through the radio, we heard the song "*Vilnius mūsų o mes rusų, Lietuvėlė nebe mūsų.*" ("We have Vilnius but the Russians have us; Lithuania is not ours.")

At first, the Russian officers, as an advance, got 200 litai from the Russian government. They immediately started shopping in Alytus buying everything in sight: watches, clothing, food, furniture, etc. Near the railroad station of Alytus during the sale of pigs, there were long lines because the farmers raised pigs. The uhlans barracks and the square were near the station, the Russian soldiers would say "the Lithuanians really know how to make propaganda since they appear to have endless rows of pigs driven around."

## Varėna, a cooperative

People got tired of having to live under the grace of local Jewish merchants. Before the holidays, they would



Varėna police chief Jonas Venckus and his wife Bronė in front of the šauliai building which was his office and their home for almost 10 years

announce that prices are higher, especially for flour, sugar, yeast.

Then we, the school principal Mr. Ryliškis, border police commissioner Mr. Jasiūnas and I, decided to open a cooperative store ourselves. Many other civil servants contributed 100 litai to open the store. When the local Jews found out about it, they immediately sent delegations to us to talk us out of this project. “Why do you want this worry? Let’s leave everything alone as it is. And for your troubles, we will compensate you in the thousands.” But we were not tempted by their money, so in 1936 before Easter, we ordered from the Suvalkų Kalvarija a variety of flour, from Marijampolė sugar, and from Kaunas pilsner beer yeast. The civil servants and others were able to purchase these at moderate prices. Of course, everybody wanted to purchase these products from us. So the cooperative business was a success. When I had to leave Varėna, I sold my share of the cooperative for 388 litai.

The local Jews were very unhappy and threatened us: “We will not forget you!” since we competed with them economically. So things did happen to us. Mr. Ryliškis was arrested on July 12th while I was arrested on August 22nd (5). We were sent to Marijampolė prison for hard labor. But the cooperatives thrived until total nationalization occurred. To establish this we had a hard time finding space for the cooperative since so much of the town was destroyed during WWI. We found a house that still had



This map shows, in a broader context, the international politics of the mid 20th century. The Germans annexed Kaipėda region in 1939. Since the Vilnius territory was part of Poland, the Soviets took it from them when they attacked in 1939. Then the Soviets handed over the area to Lithuania in the same year on condition they would let the Soviets establish bases. But in 1940, the Soviets occupied the whole of Lithuania. The Germans attacked Poland from the West.

one wall standing. So we bought it, remodeled it to be a store while in the back, a restaurant was established.

(To be continued) Next: Soviet occupation and prison; Germany attacks the Soviet Union.

Translator’s notes:

- (1) Šauliai, or Lithuanian Riflemen’s Union, was a voluntary paramilitary organization supported by the State. Its activities were military training, sports, and culture. There were about 50,000 members, men and women.
- (2) Augustinas Voldemaras, a former prime minister, had disagreements with President Smetona. He organized an unsuccessful military putsch, was arrested, and imprisoned.
- (3) Since 1920 when Poland occupied the Vilnius territory, in protest Lithuania refused to have diplomatic relations. The Poles demanded that we establish normal relations since we were not at war. The Vilnius problem was left unresolved.
- (4) The Vilnius territory was part of Poland at that time so it was attacked and occupied by the Soviets. Since Lithuania was neutral in the war, it was not attacked. Lithuania agreed to host Polish refugees. Some 15,000 soldiers and 25,000 civilians escaped to Lithuania, where they were disarmed and interned. They were not POWs and were treated respectfully.
- (5) This would be in 1940, during Soviet occupation.

## Knights of Lithuania News

Dr. Paul-Michael Kazas  
President, Knights of Lithuania Council 110



Consul General Vaclovas Šalkauskas

With the New Year, the Knights of Lithuania, Maspeth Vyčiai Council 110 continues in its quest to protect and defend the people and Republic of Lithuania, as well as all of the neighboring free, independent, and democratic republics.

In October, at the Mid-Atlantic District meeting, our Spiritual Advisor, Father Vytautas Volertas, and Dr. Paul-Michael Kazas, President of Council 110, were given the distinct honor of receiving their fourth degrees from HM Ellie Nakrosis, President of the Mid-Atlantic District.

Earlier that month, Council 110 honored Archbishop Gintaras Grušas of Vilnius for his 60th birthday at Annunciation Church in Brooklyn. He was presented with Council 110's Freedom Award, our medallions, a \$500 donation for his service to God, and later with a New York City Street Sign in his name.

Council 110 stressed the importance of supporting the Church and the Republic of Lithuania, both of which have been under attack in recent years. Archbishop Grušas and Monsignor Edmundas Putrimas were invited to join the Maspeth Vyčiai in 2024 as it celebrates its centennial.

We thank Mr. Paul Graziano of the Associated Cultural Resource Consultants and Christina Wilkinson of the Newtown Historical Society, who offered to apply for Transfiguration Church's incorporation of Historical Sites on the State and National Register.

Mr. Graziano met Dr. Kazas some 30 years ago when he was President of another Civic Organization in Woodhaven. Having learned of Dr. Kazas' association with the Knights of Lithuania, Mr. Graziano and Ms. Wilkinson prepared the offer to make the application for our church at no cost to the Knights nor the Church. If accepted, Trans-

## our community



Air Force ROTC from John Adam's High School



Dr. Paul Michael Kazas and Vilnius Metropolitan Archbishop Gintaras Grušas

figuration would be eligible to apply for grant monies for exterior repairs to the church. It would also designate our Lithuanian Church as a National and State Historic Site for all to visit and support.

The offer is now before the Church and is under consideration whether they will proceed with the application.

On December 19th, 2021, Council 110 held its Kūčios at the Parish of Transfiguration Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church. With special appreciation, we thank our Pastor Monsignor Joseph P Calise for the use of the Parish Hall, for his support to the Knights of Lithuania, and the prayers to all in attendance.

As a result of our Kūčios, a total donation of \$2,239.09 was presented to Monsignor Calise in support of our Parish.

With profound appreciation, we thank Vaclovas Šalkauskas Consul General of the Republic of Lithuania and Adrian Kubicki, Consul General of the Republic of Poland, for their attendance at the Kūčios.

As noted by Dr. Kazas, evil is cancer that will destroy all within its path. Now more than ever, the righteous must stand together to confront and stop this evil that is threatening Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, India, and Ukraine, as well as other nations.

Consul General Šalkauskas was gracious in acknowledging the support of the Maspeth Vyčiai in promoting and defending the Republic. He was truly gracious by presenting to Dr. Kazas an Acknowledgement, Letter from the Hon Gabrielius Landsbergis, Minister of Foreign Affairs, noting the Republic's appreciation during Lithuanian World Unity Day.

Consul General Šalkauskas received the Maspeth Vyčiai medallions, its Freedom Award, a New York City Street Sign in his name, as well as a beautiful bouquet in appreciation for his service to the people and the Republic of Lithuania. Consul General Šalkauskas truly represents the heart, soul, and spirit of the people and the Republic of Lithuania. His professionalism, dedication, and friendship are true gifts to all of us. He noted the special bond and relationship that Lithuania has with Poland, the Baltic States, and Lithuania's support for Ukraine.

Consul General Kubicki received two awards, the Freedom Award from the Maspeth Knights of Lithuania and a Solidarity Award from the President of Union Chapter 37, Local 375 of District Council 37. The earlier union presentation in Manhattan had to be canceled due to issues with the venue. Dr. Kazas also serves as President of Chapter 37 and as Executive Chair of Local 375.

As a token of our mutual support and friendship, a model Bridge was also presented to Consul General Kubicki, as well as two New York City Street Sign in his name, medallions, and a floral bouquet.



The Consul General of Poland expressed his deepest appreciation to the Maspeth Vyčiai and acknowledged the very special relationship between Lithuania and Poland. He was truly touched receiving both a Freedom and Solidarity Award, especially during these dangerous times. He noted both countries prior Commonwealth and that the spirit of that relationship will fortify future challenges imposed upon the Baltics, Poland, and the region.

Dr. Kazas, on behalf of his very dear friend New York State Senator Joseph P Addabbo Jr., presented to each consulate that was honored with a very special Citation from Senator Addabbo.

The Senator highlighted his friendship and support for all free, independent, and democratic republics. He left an open invitation to the Consuls General of Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, and India to visit Albany for a tour of New York's seat of government.

Earlier, on behalf of the Union and Maspeth Knights of Lithuania, Mr. Michael Troman, President of Local 375, and Dr. Kazas met with Senator Addabbo at his office in Queens, New York, where he received a symbolic Bridge of support and friendship between Lithuania and Albany.

With great regret, our very dear friend, Kairi Kunka, Consul General of the Republic of Estonia, had to cancel her attendance at the Kūčios the night before the event. She had come into contact with someone who tested positive with COVID. Consul General Kunka was tested negative but, out of precaution, stayed isolated. She sent her love and support to all those in attendance. Dr. Kazas accepted Consul General Kunka's Solidarity Award on her behalf.

A special presentation will be made at the Estonian Consulate. Consul General Kunka is the proud daughter of the Republic of Estonia, and her commitment to the Baltic States remaining a free, independent, and democratic country deserves our greatest appreciation.

Sadly, the Hon Randhir Jaiswal Consul General of India was called away to India. His representative had a family emergency and was also called away to India. Dr. Kazas accepted the Consul General's Freedom Award on his behalf. Also honored during the presentation to the people and Republic of India was Mr. Dillion from Queens County. Mr. Dillion received the Maspeth Vyčiai medallions as well as a New York City Street Sign and bouquet. His love and support for the police, law enforcement, and



Adrian Kubicki, Consul General of Poland

## our community



Father Vytautas Volertas, Ellie Nakrosis HM, and Dr. Paul Michael Kazas



Flags of Nations honored

the principles of God, Country, Family, and Community make him a proud symbol of the Republic of India and the great United States of America.

As with each presentation, the National Anthems of Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, and India were played with greetings said in each language by Dr. Kazas.

Sadly, on the day of the event, Andrew Giuliani and Curtis Sliwa had to cancel at the last minute.

Andrew Giuliani called and then texted Dr. Kazas, apologizing for he had become ill.

Curtis Sliwa texted Dr. Kazas, apologizing and noting that he had an accident at WABC Radio and was injured. Weeks earlier Mr. Sliwa was hit by a cab, and his recent injury aggravated the prior accident.

For consideration, Dr. Kazas had proposed that future

presentations be made to both dear friends at the Lithuanian Consulate. Andrew Giuliani is the son of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. He happens to be a candidate for Governor of New York State. The Giuliani family are dear friends to Dr. Kazas and the Maspeth Knights. Both Freedom Awards were accepted by Dr. Kazas on their behalf.

We congratulate Andrew Giuliani and his beautiful wife, Živilė Rezygtė, who is Lithuanian, on the birth of their baby girl Grace. We hope to have a special mass and reception at Transfiguration Church at a later date and time in their honor.

We also thanked Ramutė Žukas, President of the Lithuanian American Community Long Island District, who read the meaning of Kūčios at the event. She and Ellie Nakrosis were presented with beautiful bouquets.

Appreciation was also extended to Mr. Simcha Waisman of the 102nd Police Precinct Community Council for his participation and support.

With great appreciation, we thank Father Vytautas Volertas, the Spiritual Advisor to the Maspeth Vyčiai and the Spiritual Advisor to the Mid-Atlantic District and the Lithuanian-American Community Long Island District, for performing the opening prayer.

Special appreciation was extended to Loretta Kazas Villanova, sister to Dr. Kazas, for her assistance. We couldn't have held the Kūčios without her support. She had donated all of the desserts and many of the raffle items as well as ran the raffle. As a result, from the raffle alone, she, with assistance from the young girls from the Verbil, Walter, and Kender families, raised \$1,139.00, all of which proceeds were donated to the church. A special bouquet and large Christmas wreath were presented to her as a symbol of our love and appreciation. We also thank our very dear friend and member Gaetana Lana for all her donations and support toward the raffle and the Vyčiai.

We thank Maureen Verbil, Mary Colon, and Maryann Rokus who have shown true love and great support to the greater Lithuanian-American Community and for all their contributions.

Appreciation was also extended to Rimantas Simas of A&R Video and Disco Jockey who, with his beautiful wife, performed as our DJ providing special lighting effects, a video of Christmas in Lithuania, and the beautiful music of the season.

Thanks are extended to our outstanding Caterer Chris from Krakus Delicatessen. Chris went above and beyond in preparing the food to cover the 12 staples needed for the Kūčios, which included potato pancakes, blitzes, herring, fish filet, etc.

The spirit of Kūčios was best represented on the basis of the family. Council 110 is truly blessed to have the love

and support of the Verbil, Kender, and Walter families.

As part of the Kūčios we held a candlelight march down the red carpet in memory of all those who have passed before us with those participating reciting the names of their loved ones.

The memories of John Verbil, Anna Marie Verbil, James Verbil, Franz Walter, and Mary Ann Walter were honored. Our Color Guard, which included Master Sergeant Robles of the Air Force ROTC from John Adam's High School and Commandant Anthony G Pace of the Coastal Patrol Cadet Corp, joined in the presentation to the Verbil, Kender, and Walter families. The Nations flags of the United States, Lithuania, Ireland, and Germany to the family members. Thereafter, taps were played in their memories and in memory of those who have given their service and passed.

The Maspeth Knights of Lithuania acknowledge that these are very dangerous times for Lithuania, the Baltics, Poland, and Ukraine. Now more than ever, we respectfully call on the righteous to do what they can now to defend and support them.



Father Vytautas Volertas, Ramutė Žukas, Consul General Vaclovas Šalkauskas, and Ellie Nakrosis



Dr. Paul Michael Kazas, Senator Joseph P Addabbo, and Michael Troman

# The Gifts of Creativity and Togetherness on Epiphany Day

Irena Raščiuviėnė



Draugystė Lithuanian School in Alikante, Spain

"We have come to the celebration of Epiphany Day on the path illuminated by the Christmas Star. Let us be generous and kind like those three Wise Men were. Let us give each other something that would link us to our ancestors, would strengthen Lithuanian traditions, and would encourage us to pursue noble goals," the organizers of the international greetings project "Let Christmas Come and Unite our Hearts" addressed participants in many countries of the world – the United States, Belgium, Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Sakartvel, and elsewhere.

The message did not vanish like a sound in a desert. It was heard and accepted. The members of the communities were encouraged to create scripts, to explain the meaning of various Christmas rituals and symbols, to learn songs, games, and poems, to organize workshops, to play, write, draw, and construct. The result was a spectacular and exciting celebration that was enjoyed by everyone, and during which, one could see and feel the meaning of everyday chores, experience the joy of doing things together, and preserve this togetherness so that it would not be ruined by any hardships.

At the beginning of the concert, seemingly very different motives converged. Against the background of falling snowflakes, a fragment of music from „The Nutcracker“

ballet was played. Then we saw cherry trees blossoming, and the peaceful Advent song "Gardens, gardens, leliumoj, Green Gardens, leliumoj" was sung. Together with this melody, a poem by the poet Jonas Mačiukevičius was recited. A special link between the seasons was conveyed. From far away, from long ago, our old traditional festivals come to us. They have slightly changed throughout many years but they preserve their essence. They are not forgotten. They are cherished, and they bring people together. Their geography is vast! Elona Bagdanavičienė, who sang and recited in Lithuania, is followed by Auksė Motto, President of the Council of Education, who stands on the other side of the ocean, dressed in white, with a bouquet of poinsettias in her hands. "What is Christmas? It is tender memories of the past, the courage to embrace the present, and the hope to see the future", she says, welcoming the participants and the audience. In the background of different landscapes, members of the Council of Education say their greetings: Kristina Vyšniauskaitė, Rasa Zakarauskienė, Kristina Petraitiėnė, Vitalija Virbukienė, Giedrius Stankevičius, Laima Apanavičienė, and Asta Čuplinskienė. Soon after that, from Vilnius Cathedral Square, where real snowflakes are falling and a spectacular Christmas tree is twinkling, the



Vasario 16-osios School in Germany



Lithuanian Language and Culture Center in Sakartvelo Technical University

representatives of the ŠMSM, Virginija Rinkevičienė, Rūta Stanaitienė, Daiva Žemgulienė, Elvyra Buzienė, and Rūta Ramanauskienė, are sending their greetings.

Although we are separated from each other by huge distances, we are united by the bright mood, the words of good wishes, the desire to cheer up, to surprise, to show what interesting and beautiful things we have learned, discovered, and created. We try to show the places where we learn, work, and play -- our classrooms and courtyards, halls and playgrounds, home and outside. We see decorated Christmas trees, white tablecloths, traditional dishes, Advent calendars, gifts brought by Santa Claus and created by the children themselves, drawings,

greeting cards, and posters. So much ingenuity, so much effort was put in all of it! As befits a festive occasion, the children are dressed up in the most appropriate clothes for the occasion: some in white like angels, others in national colors, others in the costumes of bunnies, elves, and other fairy tale characters to suit their play, poetic composition or fun games, to feel comfortable to work on their crafts and to make sure they don't feel too cold when they walk outside. Candle flames, fir tree wreaths, straw decorations, lanterns, and jingle bells create the festive atmosphere. Children, teachers, parents, and neighbors share Christmas presents and sing hymns and songs. Greetings are said, poems are recited, music is

## our community



Rūtėlė children's folklore group, Liudvikas Rėza Lithuanian School in Kaliningrad, Russia



Darius and Girėnas Lithuanian School in Pusk, Poland

played. The knowledge of the origins and meaning of the main winter festivals is enhanced by narrative interludes about the customs and traditions of the Advent season, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and Epiphany. "Life does not stand still, generations change, but the essence of a human being, the relationship with his or her grandparents, great-grandparents, and the essence of his or her nation remain, and we must preserve them. And we will if we understand their importance," says Elona Bagdanavičienė in conclusion.

The number of greeting gifts created was large. They barely fit into one hour of remote viewing. Fortunately, it now continues in a boundless virtual space, and at any time we can immerse ourselves in the mood of the festive event, feel its spirit, which also holds the mystery of the holy night, peace, and joy, fun, hopes for the future, and most importantly – love for Lithuania. After all, a nation's

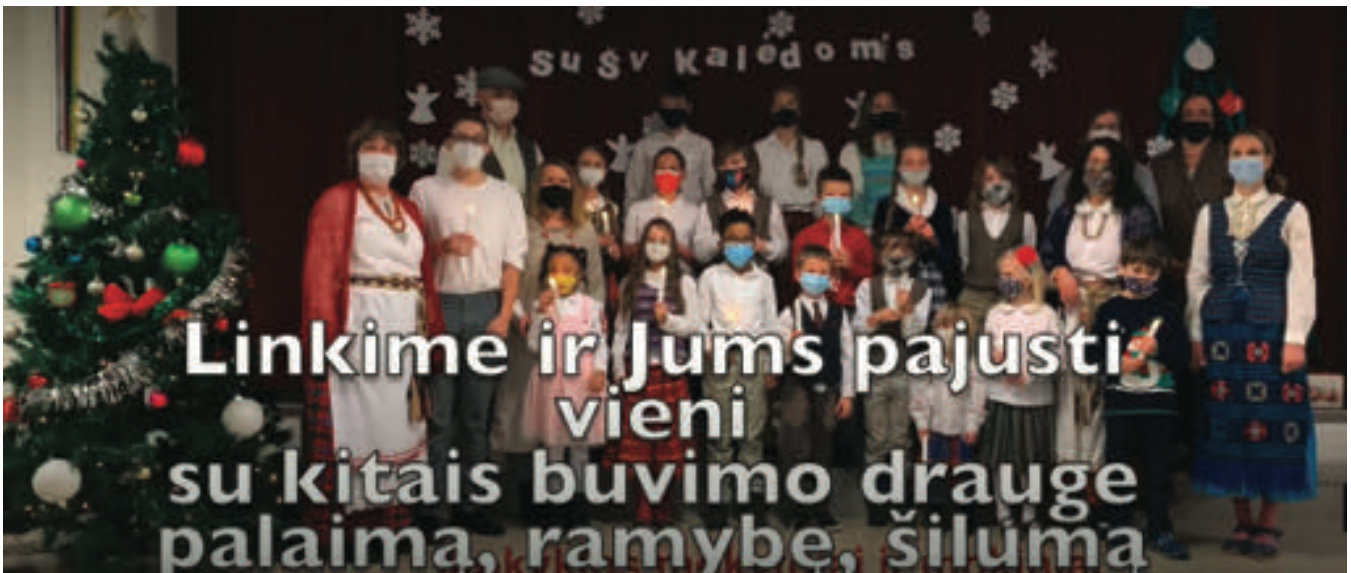
culture is the source from which wisdom and feelings have been drawn for centuries, and traditions that have preserved deep layers of experience strengthen our roots and the bond with our loved ones, and then, even in a foreign country, even in the most distant lands, you do not have to feel as if you are a person without a place, and when you come back to your homeland, whether to stay or to visit, you do not have to feel a stranger. This is certainly what the organizers and participants of the international greetings project "Let Christmas Come and Unite our Hearts" were thinking about. When we hear and see what has been created, we believe in the noble mission of their work.

Links:

<https://svietimotaryba.org/> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoEB8mgGQPA>



St. Casimir's Lithuanian School in Los Angeles, California



Martynas Mažvydas Lithuanian School, Minnesota



Lietuvėlė Lithuanian School, Jackson, New Jersey

# our community

## Chicago Lithuanians remember January 13th



Undeterred by the icy Chicago winds, on January 9, a sunny winter Sunday, Chicago Lithuanians gathered to commemorate the events of January 13th by running along the "Freedom Road". On the shores of Lake Michigan, Chicago Lithuanians and their families were greeted by the Consul General of the Republic of Lithuania Sigrida Mulevičienė. The Lithuanian national anthem was sung and a minute of silence was observed in honor of the victims of the events of January 13th. Representatives of the Riflemen's Union, the Chicago Running Club, the Lithuanian-American community, and the Scouting youth also took part in the commemoration. The 9 km run was followed by a winter swim in Lake Michigan. The hardest runners braved the icy waters wearing Lithuanian paraphernalia with the slogan "For Lithuania!" This year, the Lithuanian American Community joined the run and rewarded the participants with prizes specially created for this occasion. At the finish line, the Riflemen and Scouts treated the participants to army-style hot cereal and hot drinks. Thank you to all those who took part in preserving Lithuania's historical memory and promoting Lithuanian identity! The event was organized by the Consulate General of the Republic of Lithuania in Chicago, the Lithuanian Running Club of Chicago, the Lithuanian Rifle Union Abroad, the Lithuanian Community of the USA, and the Scout Association and sponsored by the Lithuanian Foundation.



# We run on the "Path of Life and Death" to remember the January 13th events

By Edita Buzėnienė

For the fourth year in a row, the Colorado Lithuanian School, together with the Colorado Lithuanian community, organized the run "On the Path of Life and Death" in commemoration of the January 13th events. Lithuanians from all over the world participated in the run, thus remembering the tragic events of 1991 when Soviet troops stormed the Vilnius Television Tower and the Radio and the Television Committee building, killing 14 civilians and injuring over 140.

On the beautiful morning of January 16, 2022, Colorado Lithuanians were paying their respects and expressing gratitude to those who died defending Lithuania's freedom. Dressed in Lithuanian colors, they ran a 5 km course, and the children ran 1.2 km. On the same day, the Portland Lithuanian community members also ran and completed the course in Oregon.

After the run was over, the runners enjoyed warm tea, coffee, and snacks. They rejoiced in Lithuania's freedom and shared their memories of Lithuania. All participants received letters of appreciation. We thank all those who contributed and ran together.



## Sausio 13 -osios pagarbos bėgimas "Gyvybės ir mirties keliu"

Mieli lietuviai!

Svečiuojusi pas Močiutę Liliana Denveryje ir labai džiaugiuosi, kad būdamas čia, galėjau pagerbti Sausio 13-tą pagarbos bėgimu!

Buvo įspūdinga ir įsimintina!

Dėkojame visiems organizatoriams už suteiktą galimybę pagerbti šią datą! Manau, tai labai svarbu kiekvienam

lietuviui, kur jis bebūtų !



## current events

### Security

...Due to tensions on the Lithuanian-Belarus and Poland-Belarus borders, the Lithuanian legislature, Seimas, declared a state of emergency and placed all on-duty military units on high alert status to reduce the time to come to the aid of the State Border Guard Service (VSAT). All travel is banned within 5 km of the border with Belarus unless allowed by border guards, and border guards can use "mental coercion" and "proportional physical violence" to prevent migrants from entering Lithuania. Mobile phones could be taken away from migrants, and public gatherings near the border and in the migrant camps could be forbidden. Belarus is accused of encouraging illegal immigrants from the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Africa to cross the border into the European Union in revenge for sanctions imposed on Belarus for human rights abuses.

...Refugees from Belarus fall into two categories: those fleeing Belarus and others. Dissidents fleeing the regime of President Aleksandr Lukashenko seem to be readily processed. The head of the Lithuanian migration department, Evelina Gudžinskaitė, said, "They blend in, and society accepts them". The others, many from Iraq, some Chechens, some from Southeast Asia, have been held up for months. Only ten of 2,639 asylum requests from non-Belarusians were granted. The 2018 Nobel Peace Prize co-Laureate, Nadia Murad, a Yazidis woman from Iraq, met with Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė to seek assistance for Iraqis persecuted by ISIS and stuck at the border.

...Lithuania is transferring an L-39 ZA turboprop armed reconnaissance trainer aircraft to Ukraine. Currently held on a trust basis by the Lithuania Armed Forces, it will be transferred on a non-reimbursable basis. Since the 2014 Russian aggression, Lithuania has gradually escalated its support to Ukraine by first providing medical care and rehabilitation to injured service members. In 2017 it provided military training missions and instructors. More recently, it provided surplus ammunition and weapons. Lithuania provides support to Ukraine within the limitations of international agreements and the U.N. Charter regulations for regional and collective agreements.

...The Polish Air Force will replace the Danish and Portuguese air detachments at Šiauliai airbase for three months as part of the NATO Air Policing Mission rotation covering Baltic airspace with four F-16 fighter jets. This detachment of 150 personnel will be supplemented by a similar detachment from Belgium at an airbase in Estonia with another four F-16s. An air detachment includes

pilots, support personnel, engineers, paramedics, communication specialists, and other essential personnel. NATO has provided air cover since Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania joined NATO in 2004.

...The military facility in Rukla will be upgraded during 2023-2026 with a 200 million euro investment by Germany implemented via the NATO Support and Procurement Agency and the NATO Energy Security Center of Excellence. Improvements will include new barracks, command posts, mess hall, sports facility, training classrooms, medical post, and roads. A separate equipment depot will support Artillery facilities and the Logistical Battalions of the Iron Wolf Brigade and the NATO enhanced Forward Presence Battalion Battle Group. It will include building maintenance facilities, garages, warehouses, shelters, gas facilities, washing facilities, and roads. Planning and design are scheduled for 2022 with delivery in stages during the following four years.

...The Lithuanian Ministry of Defense reports that a team from the Defensive Cyber Operations Element of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard is sharing its knowledge of the cyber defense and threat assessment with specialists at the Lithuanian National Cyber Security Center and the Regional Cyber Defense Center which started operations last summer. Cyber security specialists from Ukraine and Georgia are already working at the regional center. In turn, some regional specialists will visit Pennsylvania.

...Two Lithuanian citizens were found guilty of spying for Russia and sent to prison. For four years, Aleksejus Greičius used Russian funds to support sporting events as Managing Director of the Baltic Youth Association. He then photographed and filmed the events and spectators, published the information, and passed the information on to a Russian intelligence officer for payment. He was sentenced to four years. Mindaugas Tunikaitis lived close to the Kaliningrad border and observed, photographed, and filmed objects and collected information online and through contacts. He then would sell this information to the same Russian intelligence officer. Because he confessed and cooperated he was only sentenced to a year and a half.

...U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III and Lithuanian Defense Minister Arvydas Anušauskas signed a Reciprocal Defense Procurement Agreement to facilitate future arms purchases and improve their military interoperability between the U.S. and Lithuanian Armed Forces. Secretary Austin told Defense Minister Anušauskas that

Lithuania “has become a beacon of democracy in the region. That includes hosting exiled Russian and Belarusian opposition leaders, which sets an important example for other allies to follow.”

...The U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency has approved the \$125-million sale of 230 Javelin missiles and 20 Javelin launchers to Lithuania. The two-person anti-tank weapon system has infrared homing. As a fire and forget system, the team can change position immediately after launch, and it has a tandem-shaped charge warhead to defeat reactive armor. It can attack the top of the tank target where the armor is likely to be thinnest.

...In accordance with the European Union’s directive that each of the 27 member countries set up a cybersecurity center, the Lithuanian Defense Ministry is setting up a National Coordination Center. The NCC will provide cyber security expertise and will contribute to the dissemination of cybersecurity education programs in Lithuania.

...In July 2020, the Foreign Ministers of Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine established the Lublin Triangle as a tripartite cooperative platform for security, economic and socio-humanitarian areas. Recently the presidents of the three countries, Andrzej Duda, Gitanas Nausėda, and Volodymyr Zelensky, met in the village of Huta in western Ukraine in the Carpathian Mountains at the urgent request of President Zelensky. The Presidents discussed their meeting with President Joe Biden at the Bucharest Nine meeting and their joint counteraction to Russia’s hybrid threats and concern over the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline which gives Russia near monopolization of the European gas market

...Lithuania has acquired for immediate delivery 125 Mercedes-Benz GD290 all-terrain high cross-country used vehicles from the Netherlands for the National Defense Volunteer Force guarding the border with Belarus. The 6 million euro purchase includes 165 GD290s and other equipment for delivery in the spring and autumn of 2022.

...According to GlobalData, a leading analytics company, Lithuania is projected to increase its defense spending by over 7% compound growth over the next 5 years to 1.9 billion dollars by 2026. It says that Lithuania has consistently spent over 2% since 2018, a higher percentage of its GDP on defense than any other European NATO ally. The spending is focused on moving troops and commanders quickly with the purchase of Black Hawk helicopters and Oshkosh Joint Light Tactical Vehicles.

...Lithuanian border guards had to use tear gas to quell unrest at the Foreigners’ Registration Center in Pabradė, near Vilnius. The guards and interpreters from the European Asylum Support Office met with asylum seekers about administrative procedures which could keep them in limbo for up a year. The migrants were upset and rioted, which was quelled by the tear gas.

...Lithuania offered migrants who agree to return to their countries of origin a free one-way ticket plus 1,000 euros. The cash incentive would be funded by the European Commission. So far only 1% of applicants have been granted refugee status.

### **Covid-19**

...The Lithuanian government is sending medical equipment worth 80,000 euros to Latvia to help them fight the pandemic. The equipment includes 50 B.Braun Infusomat Space IV pumps worth 75,000 euros and five Sino-Hero S80 patient monitors worth 5,000 euros.

...Lithuania will also be sending 201,200 doses of Pfizer vaccine to Latvia. They were purchased under an advance purchase agreement.

...President Gitanas Nausėda vetoed a bill that would have required unvaccinated workers in certain professions to pay for their mandatory Covid-10 tests. The rationale was that the bill would discourage workers from taking the tests and delay diagnosis with increase spread of the disease. Later the Seimas voted to overturn the veto.

...The state will continue to pay for tests for vaccinated people who have high-risk contact with an infected person. If such a person is not tested, they must self-isolate for ten days.

...Medical masks or respirators will be required in shops and other places where face coverings are required. Masks must cover the mouth, nose, and chin and are to be changed every 3-4 hours or when they become wet. Masks are not required when exercising.

...A 1-year old boy from Telšiai with a diagnosis of laryngitis is registered as the first child to die of Covid-19. Telšiai is about 45 miles northeast of Klaipėda in western Lithuania.

...End of year data from Lithuania, with a population of 2.8 million, reports 524,128 confirmed Covid-19 cases

## current events

(19%) with 1,059 patients in hospitals with deaths caused by Covid-19 complications stood at 7,439 (0.3%).

### Business

...The President of the Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists, Vidmantas Janulevičius, met with President Nausėda and called for a more open immigration policy to neighboring countries as a route to alleviate the shortage of workers which is limiting economic growth. He said, "So our suggestion is to try and expand immigration from the countries we know, namely, Ukraine, Belarus". However, the President's adviser Irena Segalovičienė suggested that more focus should be on retraining and policies to encourage repatriation of the Lithuanian diaspora.

...The Lithuanian electricity transmission system, Litgrid, has completed the first of four synchronization projects of the LitPol Link, the interconnection between Lithuania and Poland. The upgraded LitPol Link station near Alytus is now capable of operating in synchronous mode with the Continental European Synchronous Area. Activation is projected to be in 2025. Currently, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania together with Russia and Belarus operate in a system where the frequency is centrally controlled by Russia. Over 97% of Litgrid stock is owned by the Lithuanian Ministry of Energy.

...The Chinese embassy in Vilnius has "temporarily" suspended consular services until further notice for "technical reasons". The action comes after Lithuania permitted Taiwan to open an office in Lithuania under the name Taiwan and the opening of a de facto Lithuanian Embassy in Taiwan.

...The day after the opening of the Taiwanese Representative Office in Vilnius, Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said that the U.S. agreed to offer a \$600 million export credit deal with the U.S.-owned Export-Import Bank of the United States. It is hoped that this will soften fallout from China's response to the Taiwanese relationship with Lithuania. Landsbergis wished that the European Union was as supportive.

...LeverX Group, the Belarusian strategic partner of the large German software manufacturer, SAP, is entering the Lithuanian market to expand its operations in Estonia, Latvia, and other EU countries. It currently has operations in the USA, Russia, and Uzbekistan and has offices in Kyiv (Ukraine), Wrocław (Poland), and Heidelberg (Germany). LeverX Group has been a SAP partner for 18 years and employs 1,500 professionals. Over the past 5 years, it has worked with Baltic companies to implement over

20 projects in retail, wood-processing, engineering, and chemical industries.

...LRT, the Lithuanian public broadcaster, reports that President Gitanas Nausėda said that the use of the word "Taiwanese" in the name of the representative office in Vilnius was a mistake. China has keyed on this opinion to recommend corrective action which Lithuania is ignoring.

...Lithuania has allocated 6 million euros for businesses affected by China's restrictions on Lithuanian goods. Five million euros are scheduled for presenting companies products abroad and one million euros for covering the costs of new certifications.

...China is not only boycotting Lithuanian products but it is instituting secondary boycotts by pressuring other country's companies, e.g. Germany's Continental Corp., to exclude Lithuanian-made components in their products. Continental has a major plant in Kaunas where it manufactures auto door and seat controllers plus other electronic parts which it exports to Europe and China. The dispute is heading to the World Trade Organization but it can take years of data gathering, testimony before any resolution.

...One Lithuanian company has worked around the Chinese boycott. Rokiškio Sūris, a large dairy processor, is delivering its exports to Poland for transshipping to China. Another dairy processor, Vilvi Group, has found other markets for its products when China closed its market.

...Taiwan, a world leader in semiconductor manufacturing, has assembled a task force to offer expertise, train engineers, and attract investment in semiconductors in Lithuania as an entry into the European market. In turn, Lithuania has a world reputation in lasers and can participate in a mutually beneficial exchange. A Taiwanese delegation has already signed Memorandums of Understanding with Invest Lithuania and Enterprise Lithuania to promote collaboration in semiconductors and biotechnology. The Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) captures 54% of world foundry revenue and has been looking to diversify its manufacturing base in light of Chinese threats toward Taiwan.

...Lithuania has opened an Embassy in South Korea to bolster opportunities for Lithuanian exporters to like-minded partners in the Asia-Pacific region.

...Lithuania is not the only country on China's "black list".

Some Indian Members of Parliament attended a meeting organized by the Tibetan government in exile. In response, the Chinese Embassy's Political Counselor sent letters to the offending MPs to not engage with an "out-and-out separatist political group and an illegal organization". It goes on to say, "Indian government has recognized that the Tibet Autonomous Region is part of the territory of the People's Republic of China" and Beijing "firmly opposes any anti-China separatist activities conducted by 'Tibetan independence' forces in any capacity". China has also reacted to any Indian contact with Taiwan's Formosa Club which is organized by Taiwan's Minister of Foreign Affairs to enhance friendship and peace stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

...In 2018 the state-owned railway, Lithuanian Railroads, signed an agreement ending in 2023 that the worlds' largest producer of potash used in fertilizers, Belarusian owned Belaruskali, could ship potash via rail through Klaipeda. The fees were pre-paid. After the disputed Belarusian presidential election, Belarus was subject to economic sanctions which put a cloud over this multi-year agreement. Some Lithuanian ministers have offered to resign and the CEO of Lithuanian Railways has tendered his resignation because they honored the contract over the recent sanctions.

### General

...Five volunteers working in a garage near Vilnius are packing food and clothing for migrants who will be denied entry along the Belarus border. With food provided by the Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration and Caritas, the Catholic relief organization, the space is provided by the border guards. Border guards will distribute the packages to migrants turned away.

...Relocating from Venezuela, another 10 Lithuanian citizens, people of Lithuanian descent, and their family members have arrived in Lithuania via help from the Lithuanian Embassy in Spain. They will be helped to resettle by the Refugee Center in Vilnius. To date, about 57 people have been repatriated from Venezuela because of economic and political instability. It is estimated that 1,000 Lithuanians are living in Venezuela, and 100 have made contact to be relocated.

...The Seimas decriminalized the possession of small amounts of cannabis (less than 5 grams) and cocaine and heroin (less than 0.2 grams).

...Šiauliai, about 100 miles northwest of Vilnius, was the

second-largest population of Jews in Lithuania and is the site of a mass grave of Holocaust victims including Jews, Soviet soldiers, and local Lithuanians. Local officials have halted the construction of a bicycle path near the mass grave when the proximity became known via Facebook posting by the former chief rabbi of Lithuania, Rabbi Kalev Krelin.

...Currently, lottery organizers pay a 5% tax on sold tickets into the state budget and directly allocate 8% of revenue for sports. Under new tax laws, in July 2022, they will pay 13% from sold tickets into the state budget. The Lithuanian National Olympic Committee and the Lithuanian Paralympics Committee will be directly funded from the budget. It is estimated that about 20.9 million euros will be received in 2022, and another estimate is that a couple of million more euros will be available in 2023.

...The European Union statistic agency, Eurostat, reports that in the 19 EU states that use the euro currency, the average inflation rate was 4.9%. Lithuania was the highest with inflation being recorded as 9.3%. High gas prices and the high cost of imported goods were listed as the major causes with oil and gas prices increasing 27%. In comparison in the EU, France recorded a 3.4% inflation, and Germany inflation registered 6% while non-EU and non-euro members, the U.S. recorded 6% inflation and Turkey reached 36% inflation.

...The Vilnius City Council will restrict the use of coal and peat for heating starting in June 2023 because the release of fine particulate matter creates smog and exceeds WHO air quality guidelines. Households have switched to these fuels as less costly than gas and electricity. It will still be possible to burn biomass (wood) which can be considered renewable. Burning coal releases 700 times more sulfur dioxide that results in respiratory irritation and combines with water to form sulfuric acid rain. Burning coal can release metals that can cause neurological damage and developmental disorders and twice as much nitrogen dioxide which is toxic to the lungs. The Environmental Projects Management Agency will cover 50% of the costs for those who chose to replace their fossil-fuel boilers with renewable energy units. It will cover 85% of poor residents.

...According to the Freidrich Loeffler Institute (FLI), Europe is facing the worst bird-flu outbreak. FLI found 675 outbreaks in wild birds and 534 in poultry between October 1 and December 29, 2021. The flu has also been detected in mammals, such as foxes in the Netherlands and Finland, gray seals in Sweden, and otters in Finland.

# in memoriam

On behalf of the Lithuanian American Community, Bridges expresses deepest condolences on the passing of Janet Stankus, wife of Bridges Current News editor Alan Stankus, and Ričardas Urbonavičius, father of the President of the Lithuanian American Community Arvydas Urbonavičius.



Janet R. Stankus, 76, of Towamencin, passed away Wednesday, December 22, 2021. She was the wife of Alan J. Stankus, her husband of 56 years. Born February 19, 1945, in Baltimore, she was the daughter of the late Philip and Rita (Healy) Beinke. Janet was employed as a medical secretary for many years

and was a cantor at Corpus Christi Catholic Church, Lansdale, for 30 years. A proud graduate of The Catholic High School of Baltimore, she attained a black belt in Shotokan karate and was an instructor in deep water aerobics at the Lansdale YMCA. She was also an associate of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chestnut Hill. Janet traveled many times to Italy, Ireland, and Israel as well as trips to New Zealand, Japan, Russia, France, Germany, Latvia, and Lithuania. She suffered a major stroke in August and was recovering but eventually succumbed. In addition to her husband, she is survived by her children, Paul Stankus (Candice) of Cathedral City, CA, Janel Stankus of Harleysville, and Andrew Stankus (Carrie), also of Har-



leysville; five grandchildren, Ayden, Madeline, Alexander, Samantha, and Philip. She is also survived by her brother, Philip Beinke of Baltimore; and good friend, Janet Moore of Lansdale.

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