

bridges

*Commemorating
Lithuania's
1000 year
Celebration*



september 2009

L I T H U A N I A N A M E R I C A N N E W S J O U R N A L

BRIDGES

Lithuanian American News Journal
USPS 017131 – Published 10 times per year
(Jan./Feb. & Jul./Aug. combined).
Address of publication is:

LAC, Inc./BRIDGES,
3906 Lakeview Dr., Racine, WI. 53403

BRIDGES
is the official publication of the
Lithuanian American Community, Inc.

National Executive Board

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THE INFORMATION CENTER FOR HOMECOMING LITHUANIANS

Collects & provides information from Lithuania.

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Subscription rate is \$20.00 annually, 2 full years
for \$38.00 (US Mail serviced subscribers).
Subscriptions to other addresses are (US \$35.00),
payable in advance (US funds). Periodicals postage
paid at Racine, WI & additional locations.

Contact us on the Internet at:

<http://www.lithuanian-american.org>

Postmaster: Send any address correction
&/or changes to:

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*The photos on the covers and within this issue - all
taken in Lithuania during a two week span are by
photographer Rimas Gedeika of Philadelphia.*



Walking Through History

I have visited Lithuania on many different occasions. After my first three visits, all in the 1970's, I returned to the States with profound sadness, anger, helplessness, and most of all — with utter hopelessness for Lithuania.

However, my 1990's visits lifted my soul out of the negativity and sadness of the 1970's. Now, joy and optimism filled my soul. Things were beginning to look brighter and brighter for Lithuania! Her future was now in her own hands!

After the 1990's visits I did not think that I would ever again travel to Lithuania and encounter experiences which would affect me the way 1970's and 1990's trips did. .

I was wrong — very, very wrong!

This summer, after an absence of more than ten years, I once again packed up my bags and flew to Lithuania.

This time I had two specific goals — first, to attend and experience the events celebrating the Millennium of Lithuania's name and second, to see and experience Vilnius as the Cultural Capital of Europe.

I arrived in Vilnius on June 27th without any great expectations. I left Vilnius on July 14th filled with new emotions and with a deeper appreciation of my Lithuanian roots. For the first time, I fully appreciated the beauty of the Lithuanian language, its folk dances and its songs. Its traditions became more powerfully personal.

During my eighteen days I lived in Vilnius' Senamiestis (Old Town). Here, an opportunity presented itself — and I grabbed it! I could walk to all the events — to Seimas (Parliament), to Šarūno Marčiulionio Basketball Academy, to Kalnų Parkas (Park of Hills), and to many other places. I walked and I walked until I thought I would put holes in my running shoes. But it was all worth it!

Walking, I got to know Vilnius much better. I was able to see sights that I would not have seen otherwise,

hear sounds that I would not have heard, and meet many interesting people that I would have not met. And to top it off, I discovered an easy, enjoyable way to lose those extra pounds! It is quite simple: walk from early morning to early evening, then find a good outdoor restaurant, order a large bowl of saltibarsciai (cold beet soup), two cepelinai (potato dumplings) and a large bakalas (glass) of Lithuanian beer. It is a fail-proof program for losing weight and enjoying doing it,

To attend all the events was an impossible task. Hence, I chose those events which I thought would be of most interest to all.

I covered the following events:

- the two day World Lithuanian Sporto Svente (Games).
- the five day Dainų Šventė which included Ansamblio Vakaras (Ensamble Evening), the Folklore Day, and the Dainų Šventė (the culminating event held at Vingio Park).



- the historic Inauguration of Dalia Grybauskaitė as Lithuania’s first woman president.
- the “Changing of Guard.”
- the unveiling of Vinco Kudirko’s statue.

American Community’s National Executive Board — the Lithuanian Student Internship Program.

For eighteen days I experienced one adrenalin rush after another. I was flying high — so many new events, so many new faces,

hard I tried, how long I stared at the computer — the words just would not come! What should I do?

Finally, an idea began to evolve in the back of my gray cells — isn’t a picture worth a thousand words!



In addition to the ceremonial events, there were several other noteworthy events taking place concurrently - namely, the VIII World Lithuanian Community Congress, and several forums pertaining to Lithuania’s energy and economic problems.

And a very innovative pilot program started by the Lithuanian

just waiting to be captured by the camera’s eye. But, as with all good things, the day arrived when I had to regrettably return to the States

After recovering from jet lag, after sorting various fotos and memories into a reasonably working order, I finally sat down and started to try to put into words my various experiences. But, no matter how

So, why not use photographs to “write” the story?

What follows is my attempt to show, via the camera, the events, the sights, the sounds and the people of Old Town Vilnius.

Let us now proceed and see whether one picture is indeed worth a thousand words!

Sokių Vakarai

On Sunday July 5, Šokių Vakarai (Evening of Dances) took place in Žalgirio Stadium. Thousands of spectators watched as more than 8,000 folk dancers performed intricate and impressive folk dances. Among the many folk dance groups performing were several from the United States and Canada.

The three hour program was well choreographed and flowed smoothly. It was readily apparent that the dancers spent many hours in rehearsal to achieve such spectacular dance routines. What a breath-taking sight !

Since I was photographing on the field, I had a unique vantage point. I saw the dancers performing figures in unison, lifting their feet

together, gracefully lifting their partners in unison, and all formations in a straight line. Got to hand it to the instructors and to the dancers — they were great !

The dance groups ranged from young children through veteran groups. It was very encouraging to see the children's groups dancing. This means that this aspect of their culture remains alive.

After the official program ended, the spectators joined by many of the dancers continued to dance into the morning hours — under the light of the moon.





Student Internship Program

While the Millennium celebrations were garnering all the attention, there were several other noteworthy events taking place at the same time in Vilnius. One such event was

culture, enhance their Lithuanian language skills, and see “how things really work” in Lithuania.

There were 26 students (from the United States and Canada) who participated in this program; some for

one month, others for two months. They worked in hospitals, child care institutions, government offices, restaurants, accounting firms, law firms, and other business establishments.

To gain a greater insight as to how the program worked, I spent a morning observing



some of the internists at work. (A more in depth review of the program will appear in future issues of BRIDGES).



the Lithuanian Student Internship Program organized by the Executive Committee of the Lithuanian American Community (LAC).

This is a two month pilot project of LAC offering the Lithuanian students (from North America) the opportunity to spend their summers working at a Lithuanian institution. This would allow them to find out whether their envisioned career path is the one that they wish to pursue. It would also enable them to gain a greater understanding of the Lithuanian





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