

Newsletter of the Lithuanian American Community of Houston

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Joninės ~

Jul. 9

Fall Potluck ~

Oct. 7 or 8

Kūčios ~

Dec. 16 or 17

## IN THIS ISSUE:

Celebrations, NBA All Star weekend, donations, festivals, achievements of our artists and philosophers, International Council, Mokyklėlė and Sūkuryš!

## LABAS

compiled by

Liuda Flores

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produced by

Evelina Tapia

## LITHUANIAN CONNECTION

written by

Arleen Battalora

## CONTRIBUTORS:

Eglė Bytautienė, Liuda Flores, Joanne Knasas, Al Krygeris, Evelina Tapia, Dalia Woss.

*Ačiū labai!*

## NEXT EVENT ~ JONINĖS!

Sunday, July 9

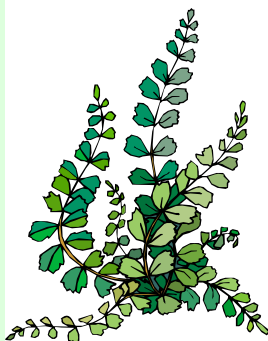
From 4 pm until the sun goes down (or as long as we desire to stay)

Bear Creek Pioneers Park

3535 War Memorial Drive

Houston, Texas 77084

Pavilion 2

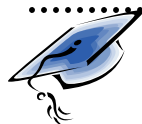


Planned activities for all age groups include dancing and singing, making of *vainikėliai*, searching for *paparčio žiedas* and much more!

Please bring wood for the grill, food and drinks for your family and enough to share with four people. LACH will provide plastic plates, cups, utensils and napkins.

Park information online at <http://www.pct3.hctx.net/PBearCreek/>

We wish to thank **Andrew Krygeris** for producing the last three issues of LABAS and welcome Evelina Tapia, who, together with Monika Zakaitytė, will be taking it to the next stage of technology – uploading it in the near future to the LACH website which Monika is building. *Ačiū labai* to all three!



## CONGRATULATIONS, GRADUATES!

May 13, 2006 was a jackpot day for LACH. While 30+ of us celebrated at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church Hall an early Mother's Day, three of our young ladies were celebrating college graduations. Two weeks later two other LACH families were feasting high school graduates. So here, in alphabetical order, are the details for your enjoyment and we enthusiastically congratulate all five!

### The Three Collegiates ...

**Lolita Ščesnavičiūtė**, daughter of Rita and Hendrikas Ščesnavičius, received an Associate in Applied Science degree with a major in GIS, Geographical Information Systems. This supplements her Bachelor's Degree in Geography from the University of Vilnius and now Lolita has her sights set on a Master's Degree. The Ščesnavičius family relocated to Houston from Kaunas several.....



### WEDDING BELLS!

LACH board member **Monika Zakaitytė** and **Kris Kline** were married in a civil ceremony on Saturday, May 20, 2006 in Sugar Land. The religious ceremony will take place July 29 in Lithuania. We wish you all the best in your future together. *Ilgiausių Metų!*

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### NEW BABY!

**Reda, Virgis** and **Karolis Vaičiuliai** are celebrating the birth of baby Ben who joined the family on June 1, 2006. *Sveikiname!*

...years ago and has been faithfully participating in our LACH gatherings. We have been privy to Rita's home cooking at *Kūčios* and Lolita's articles to LABAS.

**Evelina Pociūtė Tapia** received a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from the University of Houston Honors Program and has been accepted into its doctoral Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience program. The focus of her graduate studies will be visual perception. Evelina came to Houston from Šilutė in southwestern Lithuania, with her parents Loreta and Romas Pocius, and brother Edvinas. She married Omar Tapia, originally from Peru, and they are raising a three-year-old, Christopher Matthew (fondly known as Matas). Her parents and brother moved to Vancouver, WA, where, as you are reading this, Edvinas is graduating from high school. You may remember Loreta as the organizer of LACH children's programs for several years. We may have lost her talents but we still have Evelina, a dynamo in her own right. She is a cofounder of our folk dance group, as well as *Mokyklėlė* (our Lithuanian school program).

**Vaiva Masaitytė Turner** received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Radiological Health Engineering from Texas A&M University in College Station. Vaiva graduated *Cum Laude*. LACH newcomers do not know Vaiva, but some of us "old timers" fondly remember her involvement with our children's programs at *Kūčios* and *Užgavėnių Blynai* with both her mother, Daiva Masaitienė and her fiancée and now husband, Joshua Turner. Having moved to College Station, Vaiva could no longer share her talents with us, but we still consider her one of our own.

### ... And The Two High Schoolers ...

**Peter Stanaitis**, son of Rūta and grandson of Angela and Valdas Stanaitis, graduated from Cinco Ranch High School where he was a candidate in the Distinguished Achievement Program and also a member of Varsity Tennis. He plans to begin his college studies at HCC Westgate Campus. Rūta's sister, Lydia, came from San Diego to help celebrate as did Peter's grandmother from Philadelphia.

**Daina Vebeliunas**, barely a pre-schooler when we began celebrating *Kūčios*, graduated from Westchester Academy for International Studies. Daina is the daughter of LACH members Anne and Rimas Vebeliunas. Come fall, she plans to study Computer Sciences at the University of Texas in Dallas. We hope to see you at *Kūčios* and get an update on college life.

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### WEEKEND WITH THE "ALL STARS"

On Feb. 17 in conjunction with the NBA "All Stars" weekend in Houston, the embassy of Lithuania to the U.S., represented by Ambassador Vygaudas Ušackas, and the Lithuanian National Men's Basketball Foundation held a reception at the Hilton Americas Hotel to celebrate the almost 20 year.....

...collaboration between the NBA and Lithuanian basketball.

Mural size photographs of current and former NBA Lithuanian basketball stars were prominently displayed on the black walls of the reception hall. Above the stage, some of the most memorable moments in Lithuanian basketball history were being shown on a large screen. President Valdas Adamkus, in a pre-recorded film clip, greeted the honorees and invited guests.

NBA Commissioner David Stern was presented the Commander's Cross (*Komandorio kryžius*) and Kim Bohuny, NBA Vice-President of Basketball Operations – International, the Knight's Cross (*Riterio kryžius*) for meritorious service to Lithuania. David Stern warmly thanked the Ambassador for the honor and fondly remembered his trips to Vilnius and Kaunas. His association with Lithuanian basketball representatives started in 1986. He thanked Lithuania for providing SIX current NBA players and this from a country with barely three million people. Stern also announced that preparations were being made to organize a "Basketball without Borders" summer camp for young basketball players in Lithuania. With a smile on his face, Stern ended his remarks by wishing the Lithuanians success in the world championships this summer but to be satisfied with a silver medal rather than a gold one. The NBA Commissioner presented "All Stars" t-shirts – one with the ambassador's name and one with President Adamkus' last name.

The lighter side of the evening commenced with the presentation of a clever film in English produced by LNK TV and the Lithuanian National Men's Basketball Foundation. To everyone's delight a history professor, Algis Greitas, explained archaeological findings which "definitely" proved that basketball was invented by Lithuanians rather than by James Naismith. At the time of the Crusades, if a cannon belonging to the Lithuanians would be incapacitated by the enemy, Lithuanians would revert to "shooting" the cannon balls by hand against their enemies, thus creating basketball. At the end of the film the professor stated that the bravest soldiers and most brilliant leaders were awarded with coats of mail. Consequently, former NBA great, Šarūnas Marčiulionis, and the Lithuanian Basketball Fund director Algimantas Pavilionis presented David Stern such a heavy shirt of mail inscribed with "Lithuania" on one side and "Stern 1" on the other.

The program continued with entertainers from Lithuania. Regimantas Šilinskas played an ancient wooden Lithuanian instrument, *skrabalai*, which is somewhat of a cross between a xylophone and a marimba but is vertical rather than horizontal. Žilvinas Žvagulis and Irena Starošaitė performed Lithuanian "pop" music.

Among the basketball dignitaries at the festivities were Antanas Sireika, current coach of the Lithuanian National Basketball team and Donnie Nelson, assistant coach; Šarūnas Jasikevičius of the Indiana Pacers who later

## CONTRIBUTIONS TO BALFAS

History. BALFAS, *Bendras Amerikos Lietuvių Fondas* (the United American Lithuanian Relief Fund) was established in 1944 to help Lithuanians after World War II both in European Displaced Persons Camps and upon relocation to the United States. Subsequently it was also able to send some supplies to occupied Lithuania. Currently BALFAS, headquartered in Chicago, continues to send clothes and some other items to needy families and institutions in Lithuania as well as distributes them to recent arrivals from Lithuania in the Chicago area.

LACH Involvement. For several years LACH members have periodically donated items to BALFAS by giving them to Liuda and Gustavo Flores. They and other LACH members, who visit Chicago regularly (or Chicago relatives who come to Texas and are lassoed into helping) have flown or driven the items there. (Wise use of LACH funds. We don't pay anything.)

This time we thank **Arleen Battalora** for a significant donation of fabrics and notions. These items BALFAS sends to a vocational school in Lithuania. *Ačiū labai!*





## KUDOS TO OUR VIOLINIST

LACH member **Rasa Kalesnykaitė**, a violinist for both the Houston Ballet and Houston Grand Opera Orchestras, auditioned for a position with the Houston Symphony. She was offered a position as a contracted substitute and will be playing with the HSO beginning in the fall for an initial period of four months. During this time she will be on leave from the other two orchestras. It is quite an accomplishment to be selected by the HSO as it is numbered among the leading orchestras in the US and has received good reviews in Europe and Japan. LACH wishes you all the best, *Rasa. Valio!*

Note: Those of us in LACH who tend to frequent Houston's three classical arts venues will now get to see Rasa perform. Previously she was always in the orchestra pit and we had to go up at intermission, lean over the barrier and chat.

evening played in the NBA rookie game; Martynas Andriuskevičius of the Cleveland Cavaliers; Linas Kleiza of the Denver Nuggets, and Rimas Kurtinaitis. One of the most revered figures in basketball, Manute Bol, also made an appearance. At 7 feet 6 inches, the towering giant played with Šarūnas Marčiulionis for the Golden State Warriors in 1989 – 1990. Cut down by arthritis, he walks with a cane and can no longer shake hands with his admirers. His many humanitarian works remain a testament.

The following day a “meet and greet” event was held by LACH at St. Thomas University in lieu of an official Lithuanian Independence Day commemoration. In his remarks, Ambassador Ušackas noted how the love of freedom and love of basketball have united the U.S. and Lithuania and how noteworthy that this was being celebrated this weekend sixteen years after Lithuania regained its freedom. This may have been the last time that the personable ambassador would be visiting Houston in his official capacity as Lithuania’s Ambassador to the U.S. since his term of office is ending. Many of the Lithuanian visitors to the NBA “All Stars” weekend from around the U.S. and Lithuania, as well as LACH members, were in attendance.

As with many such events, LACH members were actively involved behind the scenes. The Honorary Consul for Texas, William Altman and his wife, Danguolė Špakevičius, asked for and got LACH help in caring for the more than 30 journalists, performers, and dignitaries from Lithuania. Whether it was driving the guests to and from hotels, airports, events, hosting in private homes, assisting at events, or doing any of the other myriad tasks, LACH was there. **AČIŪ LABAI** to all the extra hands! To name all of you would fill up another page. You, too, are All Stars!

By Dalia Woss



## FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL IN SAN ANTONIO

Lithuanians in Texas, the LAC Chapter in San Antonio, is again participating in the Folklife Festival with a cultural display. The Festival, showcasing the many heritages of Texas, is held annually in San Antonio on the Texas Institute of Cultures grounds (near the Alamo Dome). This year the dates are Thursday, June 8 thru Sunday, June 11. (Thursday & Friday 5-11pm; Saturday Noon-11pm; Sunday Noon-9pm.)

The Lithuanian booth will feature a cultural display, crafts, hands on egg etching and finger weaving for children and adults. Participants work with yarn and the end product is a friendship bracelet which they weave while learning about Lithuanian culture. LACH member, **Zita Masley**, an artist who paints in the vein of Grandma Moses, will be exhibiting her art work at the booth.

## LITHUANIA ON MY MIND

LACH members who we know have a Lietuva visit on their 2006 calendar are: **Agna Reventas, Zita Briksnis, John Knasas, Eglė Bytautienė** and son, **Dominykas**, the **Cole family, Monika** and **Kris Kline** and **Liuda Flores**. **Agna** left in May for a six-month stay and her sister, **Zita**, accompanied her for the first month. **John** is going to Klaipėda to again teach at the summer Thomistic Studies Institute. This will be his sixth time in addition to which he also spent his sabbatical teaching at the University of Vilnius in the spring of 2004. **Dominykas Bytautas** will be spending most of the summer with his grandparents in Palanga and Kretinga and **Eglė** and husband, **Laimis**, plan to spend three weeks each with him. The **Coles – Dale, Laima, Dovydas** and baby **Ieva** – are heading out in June. This will be a very special treat for Laima's family as they will meet little Ieva, born last year in Houston, for the first time. **Monika** and **Kris** will be going in July for their religious wedding ceremony in Anykščiai, Monika's birthplace. **Liuda** plans to spend the month of August reconnecting with her roots before meeting husband, Gustavo, in Madrid for a tour of the Iberian Peninsula in September, where they just may run into John Knasas who will be attending a conference in Granada at the same time. Small world! Eh?!



## SO LONG AND HEARTFELT THANKS TO THE BULOTAS

**Edmita, Vytaas and Alicija Bulota**, founding members of LACH, are moving to the East Coast. The last several years we have not seen them much at LACH gatherings, but that was not always the case. Almost singlehandedly, Vytaas built our first booth for the Houston International Festival. He not only built it, but financed all the materials for a full year until LACH was formed, collected dues, and was able to reimburse him. Both Vytaas and Edmita worked endless hours at our booth all the seven years that LACH participated in the Festival. Edmita made an enormous contribution on her own when she brought the Vilnius Puppet Theater LĖLĖ to the US in the summer of 1999 for a hugely successful, five-city, Texas tour of Children's Theaters. She headed a committee of five and granted, many LACH members pitched in, but Edmita spent over 18 months being the prime mover and shaker of the event. In addition to these two major LACH endeavors, the Bulotas could always be counted on to have a hand in most of our gatherings by providing tasty food, cozy facilities and good ideas.

We wish them all the best in their new location and, please know, that you are already greatly missed. *Gero vėjo!*



## HONORS RECEIVED

The Center for Thomistic Studies at the University of St. Thomas recently named Prof. **John F. X. Knasas** the Bishop Wendelin J. Nold Endowed Chair in Graduate Philosophy. Dr. Knasas is the first recipient of this honor, named after the first native Texan to be bishop of the diocese. Throughout Bishop Nold's administration, he stressed Catholic education. Catholic high schools were built as well as new facilities for St. Mary's Seminary.

The Center for Thomistic Studies is the only graduate program in the U.S. expressly devoted to the philosophical thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. It also is the only doctoral program at UST. John has taught at the Thomistic Center since 1983. He continues to teach philosophy each summer in Lithuania. Recently John and his wife Joanne spent 6 months in Vilnius where John taught as a Fulbright Scholar.





## HOUSTON'S INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Houston's Mayor Bill White has created a council to preserve and promote Houston's continued growth and to develop its image as a renowned international city. The title of this council is Mayor's International Affairs & Development Council (MIADC).

In order to develop contacts with a variety of nationalities and regions the Council is divided into seven committees: Africa, Americas, Asia, Canada, Europe, Middle East and South Asia. The committee of Europe, which, of course, is more in our interests, includes representatives of 24 nations, Lithuania among them.

The objective of the MIADC/Europe is to develop comprehensive plans and activities which will:

- a. advise and assist the Mayor and city representatives on matters of international affairs and development in Europe as it pertains to regional economic and sociopolitical issues affecting Houston businesses
- b. recommend mechanisms to improve communications and to enhance involvement of the European communities in Houston's civic and cultural life
- c. recommend and execute special projects that would be in the interest of Houston as an international city
- d. initiate and coordinate inbound and outbound European trade missions.

As you can see, the assignment is a mouthful and can be implemented only with difficulty, especially since a variety of nationalities are involved, many with their individual desires. To facilitate this, the MIADC/Europe committee was broken down into five sub-committees, each with a specific area of interest:

- Community and Government Relations
- Business Development and Marketing
- Art, Culture and Education
- Special Events
- Issues and Concerns

The Art, Culture and Education area seemed the one which might yield the highest return for our small community, which exhibits very limited business and governmental contacts. Therefore, Al Krygeris, our past President, joined the Art, Culture and Education sub-committee.

So far the sub-committee had two meetings. The first goal was identified to expose all nationalities in the Houston area to what the other groups had to offer. A listing of activities was collected so far from nine communities: Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Russia, Scotland and Ukraine.

The activities cover a wide variety of subjects, anywhere from language classes (nearly every community had them), cooking classes (four) to concerts, festivals and even a masquerade ball.

However, since quite a few nationalities did not submit a list of activities, this list has not been published. Target date is to publish it some time in June as part of the monthly MIADC newsletter.

The activities calendar will also be included in the Greater Houston website which will have links to the websites of the individual communities, which will contain further details about each community and its activities.

By the way, the first MIADC newsletter which was published included pictures and a write-up of the reception of Lithuanian basketball players and the Commissioner of the NBA, David J. Stern.

By Al Krygeris

## MOKYKLĖLĖ



After a year or so in the works, Lithuanian School (*Mokyklėlė*) opened its “doors” at the beginning of this year. We met every first Saturday of the month at the Spring branch of the Harris County Library. A big “Thank You” goes out to Evelina Tapia for arranging a place to meet.

We would like to think of *Mokyklėlė* not as a “real” school but rather as a time for children of Lithuanian heritage to get together. In our community, we have children who fall into one of three groups: those who are fluent in Lithuanian and speak the language at home, those who have never heard Lithuanian spoken, and children who do not speak Lithuanian but are exposed to it at home. As you can imagine, it is not easy to accommodate such diverse backgrounds.

What do we do at our *Mokyklėlė*? The goal of our monthly meetings is to instill in our children a deep respect for Lithuania. We try to achieve that by introducing them to the Lithuanian language – we are teaching them simple words and conversations that they can use if they ever venture to the land of their parents and grandparents. In Lithuanian, they have already learned numbers and colors, visited a Lithuanian playground and a farm through books, made traditional masks for *Užgavėnės*, and even colored Easter eggs (*margučiai*) – not the breakable kind. At each session we read to the children Lithuanian folktales in English and in Lithuanian so that they can understand the storyline and at the same time hear it in Lithuanian. We acquaint our pupils with Lithuanian history and traditions. Finally, we play Lithuanian games and sing Lithuanian songs. This is the part which the children seem to enjoy the most.

As we break for summer, we would like to thank the parents for their commitment to our *Mokyklėlė*. Thank you to **Zita Dubauskaitė**, **Siga** and **Algis Pliodžinskai**, **Evelina** and **Omar Tapia**, **Reda** and **Virgis Vaičiuliai**, and, of course, our dear **Liuda Flores** for their help and support.

We are already planning the new school year. Please keep *Mokyklėlė* in mind when signing up your children for their extracurricular activities. One of the new things this fall will be to have two separate age groups which, we think, will encourage more parents, especially with older children, to join us.

To the children: have a great summer and don't forget to practice Lithuanian words, games, or songs, whichever you like the most.

We look forward to seeing YOU ALL in the fall!

By Eglė Bytautienė



## LET'S DANCE!

What is a better way to socialize, exercise, practice Lithuanian traditions and share native customs if not dance? LACH's dance group *Sūkurys* is celebrating its 6<sup>th</sup> month anniversary! Those who attended *Blynų Balius* observed us perform four Lithuanian folk dances and joined us on the dance floor for *Pjoviau Šieną*. It is our goal to enliven each LACH gathering and celebration with performances and to draw more members into our group.

We usually meet on Saturdays for two hours at Harris County Spring Branch Memorial Library (off I-10 and Beltway 8) and **Siga** and **Algis Pliodžinskai** instruct us in intricacies of Lithuanian folk dancing. The repertoire is enormous and accommodates dancers from all experience levels and age groups. Our diverse group of dancers illustrates just that!

So, come join *Sūkurys*! Not only you will learn to dance, but have a fantastic time practicing and relaxing afterwards! For scheduled rehearsal dates and times, location, or any other information please email or call Evelina Tapia at [etapia@uh.edu](mailto:etapia@uh.edu) or 832-275-9946.



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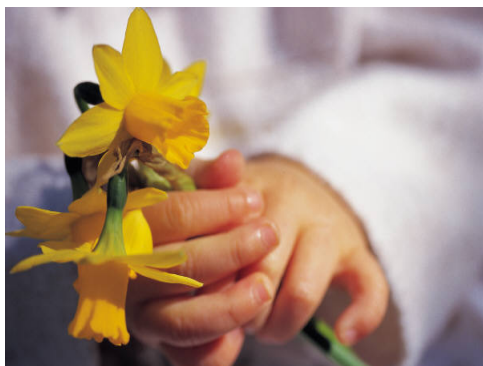
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**LACH BOARD MEMBERS**

Peter "Chip" Lazauskas  
Monika Zakaitytė Kline  
John Knasas  
Past President ~ Algis Krygeris



**LACH MEMBERSHIP**

\$15 annual dues per household (includes newsletter LABAS).  
Newsletter only is available for \$5 annually. Those with financial  
difficulties can request LABAS at no cost.

**Current members:** Please note anniversary date on mailing label for  
sending dues.

**New Members:** To join, please send dues, name, spouse's name,  
address, phone number, and e-mail address, if available. Also, please  
include minor child(ren)'s name(s) and date(s) of birth.

Please send dues and membership data to:  
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P.O. Box 667222  
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

