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Tears, Laughter and Friendship

Daughters of Lithuania Highlight Humanitarian Aid at L.A. Fundraiser

By Algis Bliudzius



Darija Žaliūnas-Francesco visiting Vilnius Home for Infants

The Daughters of Lithuania was organized in 1959 by Msgr. Dr. Feliksas Gureckas in Chicago to assist needy Lithuanian immigrants in the United States. Today, there are several chapters of the organization in the U.S. providing charitable aid, mostly to Lithuania.

The Los Angeles Chapter of the Daughters of Lithuania was founded in 1973 with approximately 36 members. Today the membership is about 60. These dedicated women reach people in need on a regular basis, providing humanitarian aid and inspiring hope. They strive to make a difference, especially in the lives of children. For more information visit their website at DaughtersofLithuaniaLA.org.

On April 28, 2013, the Daughters of Lithuania, "Lietuvos Dukterys," held their annual charity fundraiser at the Lithuanian Parish Hall in Los Angeles. The event featured a full dinner, video presentation and recital by accomplished concert pianist Rudolfas Budginas. Tickets were \$45 if purchased prior to the concert, and \$65 at the door. It should be noted that this event was organized by a new generation of Lithuanian Daughters. They must have contacted many people because the hall was full. There were 24 tables seating 10 guests at each table.

Rev. Tomas Karanauskas gave the invocation. Daiva Navarette, the Republic of Lithuania's honorary consul in Los Angeles, was in attendance. Darija Žaliūnas-Francesco and Vilija Kirsonis, the new co-presidents of the Daughters of Lithuania, made opening remarks. They welcomed the audience to the lunch-

eon-concert and informed us that first we would be treated to a hearty Lithuanian meal consisting of potatoes, sausage and cabbage.

The traditional meal was a welcome treat to the older parishioners. It was Laima Leko who lovingly prepared potato pudding "kugelis" with sour cream and bacon bits, roasted smoked country sausages with mustard, steamed vegetables and pan-fried sauerkraut with a touch of carrots. There was red and white wine to complement the meal. For desert we had cake and coffee. Not only did we finish a full meal, but we were provided with take-out containers for the remaining portions.

Vilija and Darija gave a video presentation of their trip to Lithuania. They noted that all donations go directly to Lithuania and travel was at their own expense. They visited the organizations that the Daughter of Lithuania are assisting. The L.A. Chapter supports orphanages, families in need and homes for the aged, and provides scholarships for needy students.

In the video we saw:

- Two sisters who received a scholarship to the Kaunas Jesuit High School.
- A group of 25 impoverished families in Kaunas who are sharing resources.
- The Disabled Children Center in Šiauliai, which takes care of children in need of developmental help.
- The Židrunas family, now sheltering nine people in an apartment after a home fire, who received a refrigerator.
- The Gumilauskas family, who lives in a farmhouse outside Šiauliai and are raising 23 abandoned children.
- The Rumbony's Orphanage and Home for Seniors where three sisters are caring for children and also have nine elderly ladies in residence.
- St. Joseph's Home for Children, an orphanage for 1- to 18-year-old children, run by Rūta and Genutė. They received seven new bicycles and a few tricycles for the children.

The L.A. Chapter has also sent to Lithuania 95 packages of donated clothing collected by Genovaitė Žaliūnienė.

On the table was an article published in *Draugas* by Rūta Kanclerytė, director of the St. Joseph's Home for Children, thanking the "good samaritans" for providing humanitarian aid and inspiring hope. This article disclosed the challenges in the life of orphans.



Concert pianist Rudolfas Budginas performing classical compositions without sheet music.

After the meal was finished, pianist Rudolfas Budginas was featured in the concert "Muzikos Jega." Budginas delighted the audience with his brilliant performance of classical music. Born in Lithuania, he has a Ph.D. in music from the University of Southern California and is a professor of music at Cuesta College in the San Luis Obispo area. He has performed in most capital cities of Europe, in Japan and in the U.S.

Budginas is a piano virtuoso who plays without sheet music. He played selections from the great classic composers, namely Chopin, Bach, Vivaldi, Beethoven and Schubert. At the end

of the concert, he introduced the music of modern composers such as American Dave Brubeck. As he played, music filled the hall and the audience listened in silent reverence. He also interacted with the audience by demonstrating how classic and modern music is structured. Budginas delivered a first-rate piano performance. At the end of the concert we all stood up and gave him a rousing ovation.

After the concert, Budginas addressed the audience, stating that he was delighted to perform at this fundraiser to help our homeland. He noted that his life has changed since he became a father of two little girls. He observed that the girls are innocent and need love in their development. Then a screen was placed on the stage. Budginas played a gentle melody as photographs of children visited last year were projected on the screen. Some of the children appeared smiling; others seemed bewildered in their surroundings. We saw a "potty" training class in an orphanage, where the children were sitting on their little chairs so patiently. They all were waiting to grow up, and their parental upbringing comes only from the caregivers. There was many a tear in the audience, for we all understood the hardships of being displaced from our homes.

On the table were envelopes for donations. Donations ranged from \$100 to \$5,000 dollars. My contribution was small but, as the ladies stated, "each dollar helps." We all had a great day reconnecting with our homeland and meeting old friends.

So there were tears, laughter and friendship. But the best part is that we have young ladies to carry on the work of the Daughters of Lithuania.

NY Lithuanian-American Community Elects New Executive Committee

The New York Lithuanian-American Community (NY LAC) elected a new district executive committee at its June 1, 2013, meeting. The New York District Council is now under the leadership of President Algis Grybas. Angela Miknius was elected treasurer and Vytautas Gostautas, member at large.

Retiring president, Ramutė Zukas, isn't retiring far. She has been elected as president of the Long Island (aka Great Neck) Chapter. The former Brooklyn/Queens Chapter and the Manhattan/ Staten Island/ Bronx Chapter have now been reorganized into a single chapter, the New York Chapter of the Lithuanian-American Community of the United States, under the joint leadership of Rasa Sprindys and Laurynas Vismanas.

NY LAC extends a big "ačiū" to retiring Brooklyn/Queens president Vida Jankauskas and treasurer Josephina Senken for all their work over many years of local leadership.

Lithuanian Foundation Presents 2013 Basketball Trophy and Award

For the past eight years, the Lithuanian Foundation has awarded a trophy to the winners of the Lithuanian Athletic Union of North America (LAUNA) Class "A" Men's Basketball Tournament as well as a \$1,000 donation to the winning team's chosen Lithuanian school in the United States.

This year, the winner of the LAUNA Basketball Tournament, held May 3 to 5, 2013, in Lemont, Ill., was Chicago's "Atletas," who received the 2013 trophy from Lithuanian Foundation Chairman Marius Kasniūnas. The players of "Atletas" decided to award the cash prize to Lithuanian school "Rasa" in Naperville, Ill.

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