

# VAIKO VARTAI Į MOKSLĄ / CHILD'S GATE TO LEARNING

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## February 2008

Dear benefactors,

Happy New Year! To keep you informed, we're providing you with highlights of 2007 activities and accomplishments. Each year since 1998, our organization has continued its mission of helping neglected children of Lithuania, by creating an appropriate environment for the pursuit of education and character building.

We thank all of you for your support and we hope you will continue to keep our organization in your thoughts.

Sincerely, „Child's Gate to Learning”

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## 2007 HIGHLIGHTS

### In Lithuania

**Anniversaries:** Two of the supported centers celebrated anniversaries in 2007. „Šypsniukas” in Kazlų Rūda celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and „Vilties vėrinėliai” in Žemaičių Kalvarija celebrated its 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary. Each of the centers had its own unique celebration to mark its respective anniversary. „Child's Gate to Learning” officer, Rita Venclovas, was pleased that she was able to attend the festivities and celebrate along with „Šypsniukas” founder and director, Renata Andriušienė, the center's staff, and the children who attend the center.

**Summer:** Many after school centers traditionally sponsored short camps to celebrate the end of the school year. Children who attend the „Saulutė” center in Užpaliai attend their after school activities in the school building itself. In June, their two week long summer camp was also based at the school and its environs. A newsletter, „Keturi vėjai” („The Four Winds”) recapped the fun and educational activities in which the children enthusiastically participated, thanks to their center's teachers. Many of the centers do not operate sessions during the summer, but the „Žaliakalnis” center in Kaunas continues to work with children during weekday afternoons even in summer. Thanks to a field trip arranged by the coordinators, some young attendees of the „Vilties vėrinėliai” center of Žemaičių Kalvarija had their first glimpse of and swim in the Baltic Sea. Campers from the „Vilties angelas” center of Vilnius enjoyed their camps (the center ran several one after the other to accommodate the center's many children). They dressed up in costumes and learned new songs, even though some sessions experienced cold and rainy early summer weather.

**Volunteers:** Some young Lithuanian-Americans, along with a few adults, travelled to Lithuania and helped out as volunteers for longer and shorter periods at the two supported centers in Vilnius, „Vilties Angelas” (including its summer camp) and the „Senamiesčio centras” (šv. Kryžiaus namai). They played with the children, took them on outings, helped with art projects, and

helped prepared meals and snacks. Thank you to: Lina Aukštuolis; Viktorė Siliūnas and her daughters-Andrėja, Lija, Lucė; Daiva Ragas; Regina Čyvas; Kristina Quinn.

**Other projects/activities:** A number of officers had the opportunity to visit Lithuania in 2007. They visited various organization-supported centers in Lithuania, conferred with the directors, met with Žydrūnė Liobikaitė, the organization's coordinator in Lithuania, and took care of various projects during their stays.

In April, officer Ramunė Kubilius gave a short overview of „Child's Gate to Learning” and its support for Lithuania at a symposium on migration, held at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. The conference was „*Šiuolaikinės lietuvių migracijos ypatumai: Pasaulio lietuviybės diskursai*” (*The Unique Features of Present-Day Lithuanians' Emigration: World Lithuanian Discourses*) .

Worth noting are some projects undertaken by officer Irena Grigaitis during her stay in Lithuania. She coordinated the preparation and publication of new English-language and Lithuanian language brochures that describe „Child's Gate to Learning” and a smaller information brochure that contains a short poem. More importantly, I. Grigaitis was able to spearhead the filming of the third short documentary film „*Vaikystės žingsniai*” (*„Childhood Steps*”) with Gintaras Jaronis. This documentary film is the first that contains English-language subtitles. Officers Aldona and Ramojus Vaitys, who also were in Lithuania for an extended visit, were able to help with editing decisions and in preparing the text for the subtitles.

### **In the United States**

**Financial support & specially funded projects:** Thanks to all of the individuals who in 2007 donated their time and / or who supported „*Child's Gate to Learning*” financially. (*see sep. report*). While donations helped maintain a steady level of support for all centers, large and small, each year, „Child's Gate to Learning” is also able to use specially earmarked grants and donations to financially support special requests. In particular, the support of Lithuanian Foundation and Seneca House in 2007 made it possible to fund special projects:

- „*Paguodos namai*” in the village of Rumbonys now has an upgraded, functional computer and a new Internet connection, something that previously had not been available.
- „*Vilties vėrinėliai*” in Žemaičių Kalvarija had written to request start-up funding for its new Lithuanian ethnographic ensemble that was being formed at the center—traditional musical instruments were ordered from a master craftsman in Lithuania. The center has a capable teacher to teach the children traditional folk dances, show them how to play the traditional „kanklės”, the proper techniques of blowing into the wind instruments, „birbynės”. The center's sewing machines, purchased with earlier „*Child's Gate to Learning*” supporter donations, are being used to sew folk costumes for the ensemble.

**Fund-raising events:** The officers of „*Child's Gate to Learning*”, along with committee members, sponsored successful fund-raising events in the Chicago that have become annual events—the fall luncheon („*Derliaus pietūs*”) in October and the evening soiree in November (this year called „*An Evening at Raudondvaris*”). In January 2007, „*Child's Gate to Learning*” sponsored its annual update afternoon headlining the organization's accomplishments, projects, and plans. In December 2007, the group set up tables at the Lithuanian World Center's Christmas bazaar, selling coffee, tortes and cakes and Lithuanian handicrafts to bazaar visitors.

**Support groups:** The support groups continued to provide enthusiastic support in Cleveland, Detroit, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Sunny Hills (Florida). Each support group identified its own unique ways for conducting fund-raising activities in its community.

- Fund-raising lunches were organized in **Cleveland**, before Easter, and **Sunny Hills, FL** before Christmas.
- **Philadelphia** supporters attended a showing of two Lithuanian language documentary films (one of them „*God's Children*” is about „*Child's Gate to Learning*” supported centers) and participated in an auction of artwork.
- **Detroit's** support group involved the Lithuanian Saturday school community of children and parents. „*Child's Gate to Learning*” was the chosen recipient of the 2007 pre-Christmas students' and their families' „gifts for Santa Claus” (donations annually given to a worthy cause).
- In **Washington, D.C.**, 13 year old Lithuanian-American scout Algis Reventas helped support group coordinator Teresė Landsbergis at a „*Child's Gate to Learning*” information table set up at the Scout Fair, *Kaziuko mugė*. Soon afterwards, for his Roman Catholic Confirmation community service activity, A. Reventas did his own fund-raising and collected \$1110!

#### **Special thanks**

- Pranas Prancevičius („*Voras*”) again helped with the website's content updates and maintenance.
- Lithuanian Catholic Association, „*Ateitis*” Chicago area members and their advisor, Marius Polikaitis, again volunteered as servers at the organization's annual fund-raising „*Derliaus pietūs*” („*Harvest Lunch*”) in the fall.
- The Lithuanian language papers in the Chicago area were most supportive, publishing articles sent in about the group's projects and events.

#### **Plans for 2008 m.**

A special editorial committee is hard at work completing the program book of the 5<sup>th</sup> character building. The program, called „*Sparnai*” („*Wings*”) will address some of the social and psychological challenges and situations encountered by children who attend supported centers in Lithuania. Earlier programs focused on building self-esteem and provided techniques to use in adolescent smoking and drinking prevention. All of the programs are still in use at the supported centers. The program books provide methodologies and ideas, games, songs, discussion ideas, and background readings that center workers and volunteers can adapt and use.

After a one year break, „*Child's Gate to Learning*” officers hope to again conduct a weekend seminar in Kaunas in the spring of 2008. All supported centers will be invited to send a representative number of coordinators, staff, and volunteers to take advantage of the networking and continuing education opportunities provided during the weekend.

In Fall 2008, „*Child's Gate to Learning*” will mark its 10<sup>th</sup> year of activity and support for the children of Lithuania. In the 10 years, the organization's supporter base in the United States has grown in size, but more importantly, the organization, its fund-raising projects and character building programs, have achieved a level of trust from supporters and centers on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Still, as one of the organization's founders, Rita Venclovas, has indicated, the work of „*Child's Gate to Learning*” will continue on both sides of the Atlantic, as long as it needed and requested.





Filmo sumanytoja: Irena Grigaitienė; Režisūra, kamera, montažas: Gintaro Jaronio., 2007 metai.  
Film initiator: Irena Grigaitis; editing, camera work, mounting- Gintaras Jaronis, 2007.

***Tegul mokymuisi vartai niekada nebūna uždari***  
**May the gates to learning never be closed.**