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The American Embassy Newsletter

Embassy of the United States of America to Lithuania

Special Features:

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Ambassador
John Cloud
- Residence
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Lithuania

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Message from Ambassador John Cloud

It is my great pleasure to continue the Embassy's tradition of putting out a newsletter to American citizens resident in Lithuania every four months. Mary and I have now been in Lithuania for just over three months. During that time, we have enjoyed meeting with many of you.

The American-Lithuanian relationship continues to be strong and vibrant. The relationship is most highly developed in the foreign policy and security field because of Lithuania's entry into NATO and the fact that Lithuanian soldiers serve with American soldiers in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kosovo. Lithuania has become, as we anticipated, a provider of security, not just a consumer. During my time in Lithuania, I intend to work on expanding the closeness of the relationship into other areas, including economic and cultural.

I have had the opportunity already to travel extensively through Lithuania. To date, I have been to Palanga, Nida, Klaipeda, Siauliai, Panevezys, Utena, Kaunas, Silute, and Taurage. My trips have ranged from honoring U.S. war dead (World War II prisoners of war) in Silute to attending a Zalgiris basketball game in Kaunas. In almost every city, I have visited high schools, the local political establishment, and met with the local press. Where possible, I have visited U.S. investment sites. I look forward to continuing my travels. While traveling in Klaipeda, I held a town meeting for American citizens. My wife, Mary, accompanies me on most of these trips.

In the near future, the American Center will move from the Old Town to the embassy complex on Akmenu street. This move has been underway for several years. This move represents no diminution of the American Center's resources and outreach. The library will continue to be available and the American Center will continue to conduct social and cultural programming as in the past. I look forward to seeing many of you at the new library when it opens.

I remain firmly committed to working with all of you on matters of concern. This issue contains updates on subjects such as resident permits and health insurance. I have flagged the resident permit issue as an extremely important one to senior officials in the Lithuanian government.

I wish all of you Happy Holidays and a Happy New Year!

-- Ambassador John Cloud

News from the Consular Section

Residence Permits in Lithuania

An update from the Consul

Residence permits continue to be of interest to all Americans living in Lithuania. As I mentioned at the last Town Hall meeting, I met with some of the Migration Department's staff in September and came away with some useful information.

The Migration Department asked me to share with American citizens the three most common reasons for delays in residence permit processing, pointing out that they have no control over any of them:

- required civil documents such as birth or marriage certificates not legalized (with an apostille from the issuing authority);
- applicants waiting to file permit applications after their arrival in Lithuania; and
- delays by other Lithuanian government entities providing required documentation.

I asked for Migration's recommendations on how to successfully apply for permits. They gave the following tips:

- Review the information and instructions Migration makes available before applying to ensure that you have the required documentation. They cited specifically their web site www.migracija.lt, parts of which are in English, and the brochures they have produced in English, which should be available at all Migration offices.
- Contact the Lithuanian embassy or consulate having jurisdiction over your place of residence to ensure that your documents are in order, particularly to confirm the legalization.
- Apply as soon as possible after arrival in Lithuania.
- Deal with your local Migration office first, but feel free to contact the central office in Vilnius for additional information or to solve problems. Keep in mind that all permits are approved centrally.
- Get local friends and acquaintances who speak Lithuanian to help prepare paperwork and communicate with local offices.

Migration confirmed that its goal is still to process first-time permits within 90 days and renewals within 60 days. They showed me the statistics for issuance of American citizens' permits over the last few years; it averages two months from date of application to date of approval.

There have been no regulatory changes to residence permit processing in the last year, but as Americans who have been here for longer will have noted, Migration is looking closely at health insurance, which is required by Lithuanian regulation. Two specific aspects of health insurance this regulation requires are coverage for a minimum of 20,000 litai (or equivalent) and coverage in Europe. Migration does not want a copy of the whole policy when processing a permit application, but would prefer a letter from the insurer or short version of the policy which addresses these aspects.

Migration reminded me of the fact that children lose their derivative status for residence permits when they turn 18. However, children who enroll in a local educational institution can obtain a residence permit on that basis, independent of their parents.

Please encourage any American Citizens living in Lithuania to register with the Consular Section.

They can do this online at <http://travelregistration.state.gov>

Finally, foreigners who have had residence permits for five years, or four if they speak Lithuanian, can apply for a permanent residence permit rather than an annual permit. Keep in mind that no gaps are allowed in that period of time. That means that if you go away for the summer and renew your permit upon return, the clock starts ticking again.

I was impressed by the helpful reaction we got from the Migration headquarters staff and hope that the residence permit process will be less of an irritant to American citizens in Lithuania. While we cannot engage the Government of Lithuania directly on individual cases, please continue to pass along as much detail as you are comfortable sharing, including specific dates. We use the information to assess the current situation and to illustrate the difficulties you face when we engage the Government of Lithuania. Such information is most useful to us in writing, so please feel free to e-mail us at consec@state.gov or fax us at 266 5590.

Obtaining Healthcare

The State Patient Fund provided the following information regarding Americans obtaining medical assistance at state facilities in Lithuania. By regulation, provision of health care services is based on showing an identity document with photo and proof of insurance. Those persons without sufficient proof of insurance (see below) must pay for care prior to receipt of service.

An insurance policy can be written in one of five languages, including Lithuanian and English, though it may be from any country. Other requirements for insurance documentation include a policy number, contact information for the provider, the policy holder's name, the amount of coverage, expiration date, countries where it is valid, and any coverage excluded under the policy.

The two documentary requirements for health care can be temporarily waived only in emergency cases, and only at facilities that have agreements with the State Patient Fund. Those foreigners legally employed in Lithuania and covered by SoDra (Lithuanian social security) need only present an identity document to obtain care.

The Fund confirmed that, by regulation, immigration status is not a factor when providing health care.

Calendar Items

Next American Citizen Town Hall Meeting – January 20th, 2007

Holiday Closures at the Embassy:

November 23 – Thanksgiving Day

December 25 – Christmas Day

December 26 – Boxing Day

January 1 – New Year's Day

January 15 – Martin Luther King Day

Obtaining a Driver's License

Another issue about which we frequently receive questions is the process by which Americans can obtain local driver's licenses. Foreigners staying in Lithuania long enough to need a residence permit (90 days for Americans) are required to get a local driver's license. The following information on the process of getting a local license in Vilnius was provided previously by Tom Wilbur of Vilnius on Video, and is still accurate and useful.

You will need:

1. A medical exam certificate: "Alvameda" (Seimynisku 21, tel. 275-0031, next to the Šarūnas HHotel) can give you the exam and certificate. Bring a passport-size photo and "proof of residence" (whatever you used for your residence visa, such as a copy of your real estate ownership document). The fee is 81Litas.
2. License Translation: Bring your license to an "authorized" translator like "Litinterp" (Bernardinų g.7-2, tel. 212-2924). The fee is approximately 20-25 Litas.
3. Driving Exam: If you have a valid U.S. license, you only need to take the "theoretical" exam. It's in Lithuanian but you may bring a translator. The best way to study is to download the practice test program at: <http://vtt.tik.lt/>. The exam has been made more difficult; you need to answer 80% of the questions correctly to pass. Use the practice exam to familiarize yourself with the specialized terminology. There are an inordinate number of questions about towing minutiae and police traffic hand signals. Register at "Regitra" (Lentvario 7, tel. 266-0019, next to the buildings where they issue license plates). Their site is www.regitra.lt, but the automatic online registration system does not seem to work with foreigners' "asmens kodas," so you must call them to get an exam time. Go half an hour early to register and pay in person on the second floor. Bring your passport and license. Your name will appear on the large TV monitor a few minutes before the exam; the number of your PC carrel, where you will take the exam, will be on the screen by your name. The examiner in the room will give you a document with your test result.
4. License Application: Go to the Road Police (Giraitės g. 3, second floor, window #2) to pick up your application. You should have your test result, medical certificate, license and translated copy, and passport (with a copy of the photo page) and another photo. They will give you an additional document to fill out.
5. U.S. License "Authentication": The Road Police will take your U.S. license to "authenticate," to make sure you were really issued a valid U.S. license. This is a problem since U.S. states vary in how they "authenticate," whether they charge a fee, or whether they have any procedure at all. I waited three weeks, only to be told that, since there was a fee, I had to "authenticate" my license myself. I got my state's Secretary of State to send me a fax, saying I had been issued a license. I had to print out copies of the Sec. State's web site to convince them the fax itself was authentic. Assuming all is OK, the Police will give you a paper with a phone number to call to see if your license is ready and a bank account and "imones kodas," to which you must pay 20 Litas. You must keep proof of payment, i.e., a bank stamp, so make the payment in person rather than via the internet.
6. License Pickup: Return to the Road Police (Giraitės g. 3, second floor, window #2) with your proof of payment. Congratulations!

By European Union regulation an individual may only have one valid driver's license, therefore the Lithuanian police will retain your U.S. license to be forwarded to the U.S. Embassy via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. You may check with the Consular Section after at least one month to see if we have received your U.S. license, which we can return to you.

Who We Are

Many of you may not have met our new Political/Economic Section Chief, Rebecca Dunham, our new Public Affairs Officer, Carlos Aranaga or our Regional Security Officer Dan Childs. Here is who they are and what they do!

Rebecca Dunham became the new chief of the Political/Economic Section in July. She has previously served in Damascus, Rome, and Washington, D.C. Since her arrival, the section has been focused on the sale of the Mazeikiu Nafta refinery, increasing American investment in Lithuania, extending support for operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, settling property restitution claims, and watching trends for the upcoming municipal elections. Along with the others in her section, she works to protect America's national interests. Her tour here will last three years, and she looks forward to meeting many of you during her tenure.

Carlos Aranaga will be the public affairs officer at the U.S. Embassy in Vilnius for the next year. His most recent assignment was as press officer for the European bureau at the State Department in Washington, D.C. He has worked in a variety of positions, including with our delegation to the United Nations in New York, at the Pentagon, and in India, Bolivia and Bangladesh. He is very happy to be here in Lithuania and looks forward to meeting many of you as he travels around Lithuania, or at the American Center in the Public Affairs Office's present location Pranciskonu 3/6, Vilnius, or after the office moves to Akmenu g., adjacent to the U.S. Embassy.

The Regional Security Officer (RSO) is a Special Agent from the Diplomatic Security Service, under the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security. The RSO is responsible for safeguarding U.S. personnel, government facilities and sensitive information abroad. The current RSO is **Daniel M. Childs**. Special Agent Childs has served as Assistant Regional Security Officer in Colombia and Algeria, and served in domestic assignments in the Miami Field Office and with the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force in Chicago. RSO Vilnius is responsible for approximately 60 Embassy employees, including local guards and the Marine Security Guard detachment. The RSO is also the primary liaison between the United States government and Lithuanian law enforcement. The American community often relies on the RSO for advice and information regarding police procedures, crime trends and safety tips.

News from the Public Affairs Section

Upcoming events in Vilnius involving American artists:

- **National Opera and Ballet Theatre**
November 24, Friday, 7:00 PM (November 25, December 8)

Richard Strauss
SALOME
a one-act opera, sung in German

Music director and conductor, Jacek Kasprzyk
Director, David Alden (U.S.)
Set designer, Paul Steinberg (U.S.)
Costume designer, Constance Hoffman
Lighting designer, Adam Silverman

- **Lithuanian Photo Artists Union presents
A Photo Exhibition by
Clemens Kalisher “The Invisible Man”**

“Prospekto Galerija” (Gedimino pr. 43, Vilnius)
November 15, 2006 – December 10, 2006

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About Our Organization...

The United States' principle objectives in Lithuania are:

- ***Regional Stability:*** The Mission has no greater goal than working with Lithuania in maximizing our common contribution promoting freedom and security in the world. Above all, this means an active bilateral partnership to make sure that Lithuania gets the assistance it needs to carry out cutting-edge NATO missions, such as its Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan. We will also work with Lithuania as it develops niche capabilities that enable its small military to contribute to NATO. Finally, we will encourage Lithuania to continue to serve as an advocate of and role model for pro-democracy forces throughout the former Soviet Union and elsewhere.
- ***Closer Economic Ties:*** Although there are many areas of cooperation, U.S. trade and investment volumes here lag behind several of Lithuania's European partners. To improve the situation, we are enlisting the government and resident U.S. firms in a campaign to seek more American involvement in this dynamic economy.
- ***Democracy:*** We are proud of U.S. support for Lithuania's extraordinary success in establishing a strong and vibrant democracy. We will continue those efforts by speaking out in defense of civil society, tolerance, and public probity, and reinforcing those words when possible with training resources.
- ***Law Enforcement:*** Lithuania and the United States share a common interest in combating international crime and terrorism. We will seek to increase the pace of joint operations between U.S. and Lithuanian law enforcement agencies; expand training initiatives with law enforcement officials and the judiciary; and accelerate the pace of extraditions between our two countries.
- ***Homeland Security:*** We seek to uphold U.S. immigration law while ensuring that all qualified Lithuanians have the visas they need to visit our country. In particular, we want to ensure that young Lithuanians, the country's future leaders, continue to travel, study, and work legally in the United States. We will also press the government to liberalize bureaucratic requirements imposed on American residents here.