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## Keeping tradition going



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**Vilma Alkhas, principal of the school with her son Marduk, student at the Lithuanian Heritage School outside of Minnehaha United Methodist Church.**

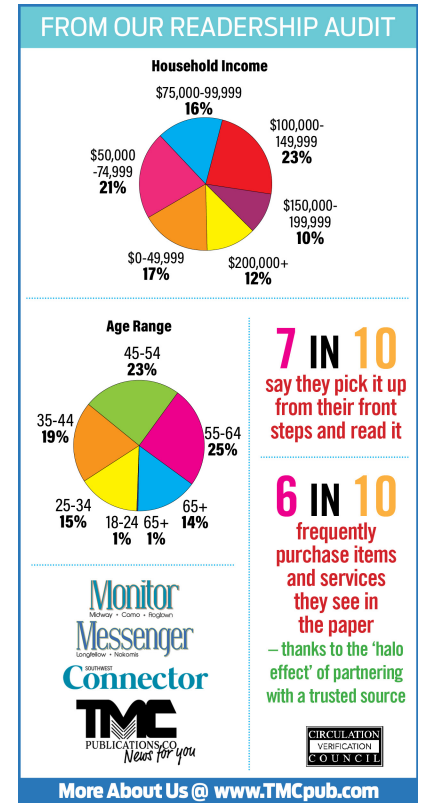
Posted Thursday, April 25, 2024 9:59 am

by Laurynas Latvis

A little known fact about South Minneapolis: it is home to a Lithuanian Heritage School that has been going strong since its inception in 1999. Founded by a Lithuanian immigrant and mother of four, at the beginning it served as a gathering place of Lithuanian immigrant families to get together, share their daily going-ons, and celebrate holidays throughout the year according to Lithuanian cultural customs and traditions.

The school went through multiple transitions and various locations until it reached its current format under the guidance of the long time principal Vilma Alkhas. Minnehaha United Methodist Church in Minneapolis' Minnehaha neighborhood has been very welcoming and opened its doors to Lithuanian Heritage School in September of 2019. This school in Minneapolis is one of many similar organizations that make up a network of Lithuanian Heritage Schools in the United States and follows the bylaws of the Lithuanian Educational Council of the United States.

Twenty students aged 4-14 make up the entire student body of the school. In the



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previous school year there were 24. There currently is a group of adult learners of Lithuanian language and culture as well, as has been the case on many occasions in the school's history. At the end of the current school year, four students – all 14-year-olds – will be taking a graduating language test in accordance with the Education Department of Lithuania.

For about 30 Saturdays a year families from surrounding neighborhoods and towns as far away as Scandia, Prior Lake and Savage bring their children to teach them Lithuanian language, history and culture among many other things. Students use old family recipes to cook and bake together. And starting at the age of seven, most of them participate in a group of traditional dancing that has performed at local Lithuanian community events as well as large basketball arenas in Minneapolis and Philadelphia.

Most families bringing their children to Saturday classes have one parent who is Lithuanian or of Lithuanian descent. The support and encouragement of parents is crucial to maintain students continuity and flow of learning. Often times parents encounter challenges that arise from scheduling extra-curricular activities and sports practices or games of students' schools they attend during the week. Parents fully understand that keeping up the Lithuanian language and traditions is a challenging load that they are willing to carry through this learning journey.

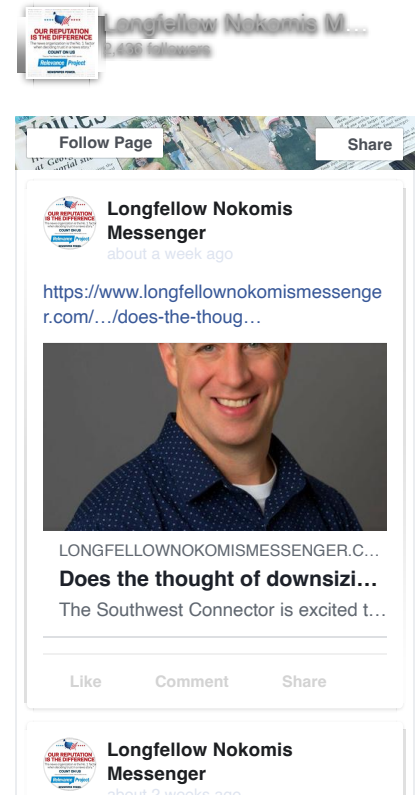
Currently, school has seven teachers and one teacher assistant all of whom have their own children attending the classes. That is usually the case with similar schools across the country and the world – parents stepping up when their children reach the age of four and take on a teaching role in the classroom. In 2023, there were 238 Lithuanian Heritage schools spread through all corners of the world. Just to name a few: Singapore; Reykjavik, Iceland; Karaganda, Kazakhstan; Cordoba, Argentina; Johannesburg, South Africa; Melbourne, Australia and Tokyo, Japan. Lithuanian Heritage School in Minneapolis over the years has become a community welcoming people and their descendants of the various Lithuanian immigration waves to the United States.

Chicago born and raised and now, longtime Cooper resident Kristina Liaugaudas worked alongside Vilma Alkhas at the Lithuanian Heritage School in Minneapolis for a decade. She herself attended a similar school in her hometown and was very familiar with the setting of such an institution, as well as joys and challenges parents and teachers encounter. But there was more than just connecting with other people of Lithuanian heritage at the school. It was a great shock and a surprise to find out that Liaugaudas' and Alkhas' grandfathers knew each other back in the village of Degaiciai, Lithuania. As the front line during World War II was moving westward and with the Red Army encroaching, Liaugaudas' grandfather decided to leave the country and asked Alkhas' grandfather to help him out to get to the train station. Generations later, the granddaughters of the two men met at the Lithuanian Heritage School.

Vilma Alkhas, principal of the school and long time resident of Keewaydin neighborhood of Minneapolis, has been a leader of the school for the last 11 years. Her children have been attending the school for that period of time. And, now she is ready to give up her leadership role to another person of Lithuanian heritage who would help take the school through the next decade and to the next level.

Lithuanian Heritage School is named after Martynas Mažvydas, a Lutheran minister and author who edited the first printed book in Lithuanian language in 1547 – the same language that one can hear almost 500 ears later across the world in the classrooms and hallways of a South Minneapolis church.

Laurynas Latvis is a teacher at Lithuanian Heritage School and a resident of the Howe neighborhood.




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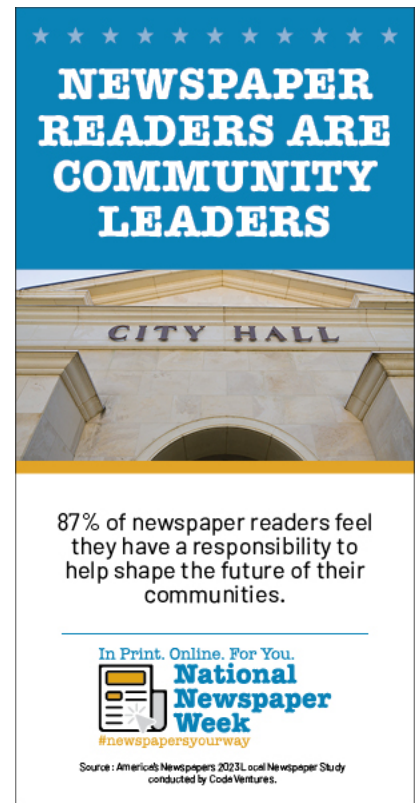
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**Dowling School celebrates 100 years**  
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Portraits of two distinguished gentlemen flank the main exit at Dowling Community School. Both are wearing high starched collars and bow ties. On one side, William Eustis looks out with a faint ...

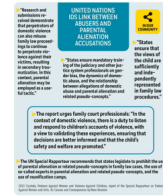




## Keeping tradition going

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A little known fact about South Minneapolis: it is home to a Lithuanian Heritage School that has been going strong since its inception in 1999. Founded by a Lithuanian immigrant and mother of four, ...



## CAUGHT BETWEEN

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She lived in Minnesota for only five months and her daughter was born in Iowa, but Dani\* has been dragged into family court in Minnesota nearly every one of the past 11 years by her ex-boyfriend. ...



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Longfellow resident, handcrafter, and entrepreneur Anna Sharratt is offering up all kinds of fun classes through her new business. In her Twin Cities Makers Circle (TCMC) classes, participants use ...



## 'Oppressive' experience: 57 hearings, 80 court orders, 12 parenting time schedules

(/stories/oppressive-experience-57-hearings-80-court-orders-12-parenting-time-schedules,70254)

What do you do when 11 judges and referees, 20 therapists, 12 mediators, two parenting consultants (with 37 directives), one custody evaluator, and one guardian ad litem haven't been able to ...

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