

What's New with Neringa?



Dovas Lietuvninkas and Saulius Petreikis perform at an Autumn concert (virtually) Neringa style.
Photo from the Camp Neringa archives

DANA VAINAUSKIENĖ

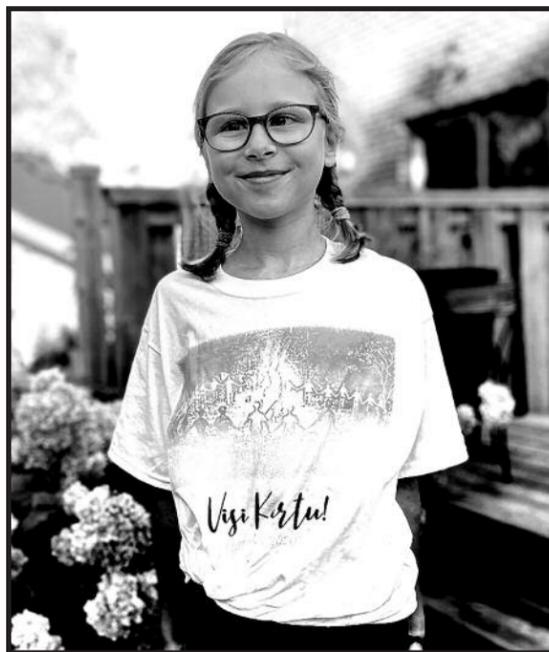
I was asked, "What are you up to, Dana?" I answered, "Well, like almost everyone, I spend all day staring at my computer." But as the days grow longer, and the birds sing louder, and the sun shines brighter, my thoughts turn to summer, and I harbor a hope that it will be better than the previous one. I'm the director of summer programs at Camp Neringa in Brattleboro, Vermont, and I'm itching for summer camps to begin again.

Neringa is not just a camp

I am fortunate that my life is intertwined with Camp Neringa. My summers are filled with children's laughter, the sounds of Lithuanian folk songs harmonizing with the din of nature and the reflective calm of communal prayer. This idyll is bolstered by an especially supportive Neringa community, for which I am very grateful. For many years, Camp Neringa has fulfilled its most important goals and aspirations—to promote campers' creativity, foster their Lithuanianness and strengthen their Catholic faith.

Summer camps were suspended in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but the activities of the Camp Neringa community did not stop! After we canceled last year's camps (for the first time in 52 years), we moved online. The Neringa community, which includes families – parents and their young campers, former campers and counselors, benefactors and, frankly, anyone who wants to participate, spent the entire year in creative, cultural and spiritual pursuits. We created and shared video slogans, produced summer video presentations for the general community, and met virtually with family camp participants, especially our 16-year-olds. We organized leadership retreats. Our virtual Culture Days was a big hit. During this week-long Zoom-fest, participants listened and interacted with author Grasilda Reiny and artist Rūta Ona Čigriejūtė on their recently published graphic novel about Adelė Dirsytė – a prisoner of conscience who penned the Siberian prayerbook "Mary, Save Us." Other participants were filmmakers Marytė Kavaliauskas and Fred Murphy, and kanklės virtuoso and composer Žemyna Trinkūnaitė. We managed to organize a remote autumn "picnic" and listen to a beautiful autumn concert by Dovas Lietuvninkas, Dovilė Bagdonaitė and Saulius Petreikis (you can still see it online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_o9x6UW2bs). We ended 2020 with Advent prayers prepared by Monika Bernotaitė.

The most important achievement of 2020 was the highly successful fundraising campaign, Neringa100, by which the Neringa, Inc. corporation purchased the



Eva Ligda from Toronto sports the latest Camp Neringa T-shirt. Photo: Laura Ligda

Vermont campsite from the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, thus ensuring that future generations of campers will be able to enjoy the unique Lithuanian Catholic faith-based camping experience.

As you can see, instead of being a pandemic washout, the year 2020 was full of Neringa-style energy and creativity.

What's that I smell?

At the beginning of 2021, camp alumna Jessica Zikaras proposed that Neringa start an online

Lithuanian culinary club. In February, almost 80 people gathered on Zoom for its first installment, hosted by Nina Jankauskaitė and her mother Vida Jankauskienė, both of New York. They cooked mainstays of the Lithuanian diet – beet and cabbage soups. Everyone joined in; some cooked along, others noted differences in their mothers' or grandmothers' recipes, and some just sat back enjoying the camaraderie and imagining the smells and tastes of the Lithuanian kitchen. Who would have thought that preserving and continuing our parents' and ancestors' culinary heritage would be so fascinating? Hopefully, this will develop into a new Neringa tradition.

As spring progressed, Aldona Lingertaitienė, Ph.D., prepared a virtual Lenten retreat focusing on prayer and reflection in preparation for Easter.

The Neringa community is planning more surprises for the months ahead. This summer, we hope that we will be able to accommodate at least a small group of campers at Neringa. It would be great if we could again gather (after a year's hiatus) at the Summer Lithuanian Festival on the grounds of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception Convent in Putnam, Connecticut. We anticipate that the pandemic will be under control next fall, and we can again meet at the popular mushroom-hunting weekend and autumn picnic. We also plan retreat weekends for women and counselors.

Unquestionably, the history of Neringa continues.

Dana Vainauskienė is the Summer Camp Director at Camp Neringa. Learn more about Neringa programs by visiting www.neringa.org. If you have any questions or want to share some ideas, write to the camp's Executive Director, Dana Grajauskaitė, at dgrajauskas@neringa.org.



Almost 80 people gathered on Zoom for the first installment of Camp Neringa's Lithuanian Culinary Club.