

Seasons of growth

A PUBLICATION FOR MEMBERS OF LAURITZEN GARDENS

WINTER 2015





SAULÈS TAKAS - PATH OF THE SUN

Sarah Hankin, marketing associate

IN CELEBRATION OF OMAHA'S SISTER CITY OF ŠIAULIAI, LITHUANIA, LAURITZEN GARDENS AND THE OMAHA FRIENDS OF ŠIAULIAI HOSTED A LIVE DEMONSTRATION OF LITHUANIAN WOOD SCULPTURE CARVING THIS SUMMER.

From August 12 through 28, gifted and acclaimed folk artist and wood carver Aurimas Šimkus of Kurtuvėnai, Lithuania, was onsite carving his depiction of Eglė - Queen of the Grass Snakes from the popular Lithuanian folk tale of the same name.

Eglė was formed out of a large green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*) log some 10 feet long, 2 feet in diameter. Šimkus also carved two benches out of black walnut (*Juglans nigra*). The artist was joined by award winning Šiauliai filmmaker Zigmąs Ripinskis, who documented the entire project on film.

Visitors could witness the carving taking shape each day during the course of the project and were given the opportunity to ask questions or just chat with the artist via a Lithuanian/English language interpreter, usually a volunteer from the Omaha Friends of Šiauliai committee. It was truly a unique opportunity to

watch the entire creative process and experience a bit of Lithuanian culture.

The public unveiling ceremony for the inaugural Lithuanian folk wood sculpture of Eglė was held on August 28. The Honorable Rolandas Kriščiūnas, Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania to the United States of America, artist Aurimas Šimkus, and kanklės musician Kristina Kuprytė were presented with certificates of honorary citizenship by Mayor Jean Stothert. Also recognized was Zigmąs Ripinskis, who is already an honorary Omahan.

This is the first phase of a multi-year Lithuanian Folk Wood Sculptures Project called "Path of the Sun" or "Saulės Takas" undertaken at Lauritzen Gardens, in collaboration with the Omaha Friends of Šiauliai committee of the Omaha Sister Cities Association (OSCA).

The long-term vision is to create a variety of Lithuanian folk wood sculpture elements, crafted by a diverse group of individual folk artists/wood carvers from Lithuania - that will adorn the grounds of Lauritzen Gardens on a long-term basis.

This inaugural wood sculpture symbolizes the gift of Lithuanian culture, from the people of Šiauliai to the people of Omaha, as Omaha celebrated the 50th anniversary of the sister-city relationship with Shizuoka, Japan, and the founding of the Omaha Sister Cities Association.

For those that missed seeing the sculpture in progress, Eglė is currently residing in the children's garden. ■

Pictured above (L to R): Zigmąs Ripinskis, Aurimas Šimkus, Kristina Kuprytė, Gediminas Murauskas, Ambassador Rolandas Kriščiūnas, and Mayor Jean Stothert