

NEWS

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U.S. Baltic Foundation

USBF Hosts First Exchange Program Summit On Gala Weekend

WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. Baltic Foundation will greatly enrich its exchange program between American experts and the emerging political, business, educational and cultural leaders of the Baltic States – Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

The exchange program has been one of the most vital missions of the 18-year-old Foundation, which has been in the forefront of helping the Baltic Nations develop into strong democratic societies after more than 50 years of Soviet occupation. In the 1990's USBF sponsored hundreds of professional, academic, and college and high school exchange participants to and from the Baltics.

“USBF has a long and proud tradition of sponsoring exchanges,” explained Maria Kivisild Ogrydziak, Chairman of the Foundation’s Board of Directors. “Our first program participant in the fall of 1990 was a young Estonian historian, Mart Laar, unknown in America, but who became the first post-communist prime minister of his county in 1992.”

Today Ms Ogrydziak announced details of the first “U.S.-Baltic Exchange Program Summit,” scheduled for Saturday, April, 19, between 0800-1230 at the Renaissance Mayflower Hotel at 1127 Connecticut Avenue, NW Washington, D.C. It will precede the Foundation’s annual Gala Awards Dinner and Silent Auction, also slated for the Mayflower Hotel that evening. Proceeds from the Gala will support the new U.S.- Baltic Exchange Program.

The Exchange Summit will welcome past and present participants and organizers of a broad range of exchanges between the United States and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as innovators of future programs. All interested persons may register for the summit online at www.usbaltic.org.

It will center on three main subjects; (1) an overview of the importance and benefit of international exchange programs (2) examples of successful past and current U.S.- Baltic exchange programs, and (3) exciting new plans by USBF to participate in a formal U.S. Department of State exchange program that will provide hundreds of new opportunities to build stronger trans-Atlantic bridges through people-to-people contacts. Ms. Diana Vidutis, former exchange program administrator at the National Academy of Sciences, will chair the summit.

The keynote speaker will be Roger Ream, the president of The Fund for American Studies. Adding to the introductory remarks will be Dr. Aldona Z. Wos, former United States Ambassador to Estonia, from 2004-2006.

For the Summit first session -- U.S.-Baltic Exchange Successes -- the panel of speakers includes Calvin Qualset, vice president of International Academic Relations of the Aukstuciai Foundation, Milton Davis, Executive Director of the Maryland Estonia Exchange Council, Lisa Martin, president of Friends of the Baltics, Eriks Zunda, the Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, and Thomas Sponsler, a Fulbright Scholar studying such exchange programs.

In the late morning session – The New U.S.-Baltic Exchange Program – presenters include Linas Kojelis , Vice Chairman for Programs at the U.S. – Baltic Foundation, Cecilia Kullman, director of the Trainee Program for the Swedish-American Chamber of Commerce, Bob Gilchrist and Andrea Strano from the Office of Nordic and Baltic Affairs, U.S. Department of State, and Mark Hilbert, Baltic Desk Officer of the Europe and Eurasia department of the International Visitors Office, U.S. Department of State. Mr. Kojelis will conclude with the summary of the Summit.

“Promoting people to people exchange programs is essential to establishing the strong and lasting friendship between the U.S and the Baltic states,” said Ms. Vidutis. “We believe the summit will provide a means for representatives of past, current and future programs to network and learn from one another.”

For more information or to set up interviews, please call Trevor Dane at (202) 785-5056, or e-mail at trevor@usbaltic.org.

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