

**Internationally known Baltic leaders and Cultural Figures,
Led by Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves,
Converge on Washington.**

THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS are out, and some of the world's most creative, innovative, and beautiful people are coming to Washington D.C. next weekend – April 17-19.

Carmen Kass, the international supermodel, the face of *Vogue*, **Steve Jürvetson**, Silicon Valley's *wunderkind* entrepreneur whose work with nanotechnology defines cutting-edge. **Jonas Mekas**, father of American avant-garde film, an icon of the arts, **Martins Ritins**, the Slow-Food chef who's served the world's biggest wigs – from Bush to Queen Elizabeth to Putin, and **Toomas Hendrik Ilves**, the New Jersey schoolboy who became a nation's President, and has faced up to hard-nosed European Union bureaucrats as well as to Russian cyber-criminals .

And.... they're all Balts – Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians.

They're gathering at the Gala Awards Dinner and Silent Auction of the U.S.-Baltic Foundation, the premier event of the Baltic community in the United States, where cultural, political, and business leaders of the three formerly captive states from both sides of the Atlantic meet to celebrate and make common cause. Head of the U.S.-Baltic Foundation and Chair of this year's Gala committee is Estonian **Maria Kivisild Ogrydziak**.

The dinner traditionally attracts the top tier of Baltic activists and philanthropists in America. Here is where the people of the Baltic demonstrate boldly that their nations have turned the corner from Communist dependencies to vibrant democracies whose success continues to inspire the journeys of other former captive nations.

Since 1990, the U.S. – Baltic Foundation has served as an education resource for policy makers in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the United States. It has developed and implemented programs to strengthen democracy and free markets in those nations, and introduced Baltic leaders to new American audiences with a series of public affairs programs.

In a revolving host system, 2008 is the year of Estonia. Estonian President Ilves will give the keynote speech. A highly-sought and energetic jazz-folk group from the Estonian city of Viljandi, **Paabel**, will provide music and dancing into the night at the Mayflower Hotel, in downtown D.C. The event will

energize those in the East Coast's active Baltic community, many of whose fathers and grandfathers were refugees and exiles from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania when the Soviets captured these countries during World War II.

Estonian model **Carmen Kass** grew up in a small town with only her mother during the end of the Soviet occupation. Now the international supermodel from Estonia has graced glamour magazines from Paris' *Vogue* to Australia's *Elle*, and lent her lean, blond, regal look to the likes of Calvin Klein, Chanel, Christian Dior, and Donna Karan. The statuesque beauty was recognized by *Vogue* as they honored her with the "Model of the Year" title at the 2000 VH1/Vogue Fashion Awards.

But there's more to the 30-year-old's resume. In February 2004, Kass joined Estonia's ruling Res Publica party and was ran for the European Parliament after her homeland joined the European Union. She also plays competitive chess, that's right, and in that same year was elected the President of Estonian National Chess League. Kass will receive the Foundation's Baltic Image Enhancement Award.

Steve Jürvetson, the 41-year-old son of Estonian refugees, virtually exploded from Stanford and California's computer community when the going was hot. "A boundless enthusiasm for the right idea" *Real Business* magazine wrote about Steve Jürvetson in 2000. With that quality, a brilliant analytical mind, and an almost childlike curiosity, Jürvetson has become one of the most sought-after venture capitalists and investment gurus in Silicon Valley. "Estonia's gift to Internet companies," wrote the Finnish magazine *Bisnes.fi* in the same year.

Jürvetson saved parents Tõnu and Tiiu some money by racing through Stanford University in two and a half years. A Henry Ford Scholar, he still graduated first in his class. Jürvetson received his MBA from the Stanford Business School, where he was an Arjay Miller Scholar; he also holds an MS in electrical engineering from Stanford. He went on to design chips for Hewlett Packard, write software in nine computer languages, and work for Steve Jobs. He quickly became a legend in Silicon Valley at the peak of the nation's Internet boom.

He is currently Managing Director of Draper Fisher Jürvetson, a leading venture capital firm with affiliate offices around the world. He was the founding venture-capital investor in Hotmail, Interwoven, and Kana. He also led the firm's investments in Tradex and Cyras, acquired for \$8 billion. His current Board positions include those in **Synthetic Genomics**, **IMML**, **NeoPhotonics**, and ZARS.

Jürvetson will receive the Foundation's U.S.-Baltic Excellence in Innovation Award.

Lithuanian-American **Jonas Mekas** has been called the "midwife" of the independent film industry in the United States. His creative output includes a lifetime of creative filmmaking and exhibitions, as well a long history of nourishing avant-garde and alternative filmmaking in this country.

Mekas was born on Christmas Eve, 1922, in Semeniskiai, a quiet farming village in Lithuania. In the violence of the German invasion in 1941, Jonas and his brother, Adolfus, ended up in a forced labor camp near Hamburg. They escaped in 1945, hid until the war. When the brothers reached America in 1949, they set out to film their new experiences.

Jonas was haunted by his memories of Lithuania. In his journals he speaks of his loneliness during his first years in America, and of the exiled Lithuanian community's empty hopes of a return to their homeland. In the otherwise industrial environment of New York, Mekas' insistence on filming natural subjects like flowers and trees and snow were a way of relocating the rural Lithuania of his childhood.

In this strange and unfamiliar city, Mekas became increasingly involved in the film community, and in 1953–1954 he began putting together his own programs of avant-garde film at Gallery East and a Film Forum series at Carl Fisher Auditorium. The following year, he founded *Film Culture*, a film journal that dealt critically with the avant garde, Hollywood and, particularly in its early years, European art film.

Mekas began writing at the *Village Voice* as a film critic in 1958, and finally turned away from feature filmmaking and devoted his column to the new, non-narrative forms of cinema emerging in America. He will receive the Baltic Cultural Achievement Award.

The tall, bow-tied, **President Toomas Ilves** represents Estonia in a time of new affluence, but also in a time when the Baltics face increasingly hostile threats from a renascent Russia, which considers the Baltics as part of its sphere of interest and rightful influence. Ilves has made a measured but forceful stand against such attempts at intimidation, while defending the United States's international record as a representative to the European Parliament.

Ilves was elected to the presidency by electoral college on September 23, 2006, and his term as President began on October 9, 2006.

He was born in Stockholm, Sweden; his parents were Estonian refugees. When he was thirteen his family moved to the United States, where Toomas Hendrik (he always uses both first and middle names) graduated from Leonia High School in Leonia, New Jersey as valedictorian. He received a bachelor's degree in psychology from Columbia University and a master's degree in the same subject from the University of Pennsylvania.

In 1984 he packed his bags and left for Munich to work as an analyst with Radio Free Europe, and nine years later he returned stateside – only this time as ambassador to the United States, Canada and Mexico for a newly independent Estonia. Of his own background, Ilves has said: “I speak English like an American, I think like a European.”

Remarkably, as a member of the European Parliament from April 2004 to September 2006 he was tireless in using these two sides of his persona to bridge the transatlantic rift after the invasion of Iraq. He blasted Donald Rumsfeld's ‘Old Europe’ paradigm as a “disaster,” and when German philosopher Jürgen Habermas and the late French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida published a joint declaration calling on Europeans to unite under a banner of anti-Americanism, Ilves wrote a passionate rebuttal. “There was too much hysteria on both sides of the Atlantic,” he said.

Ilves eventually gave up his U.S. citizenship to become Estonia's foreign minister in 1996. In more than a decade of Estonian politics, he has stood steadfastly in the center as a member of the Moderates, a party he helped create. Thanks to Ilves's friendship with Mart Laar, a former prime minister, Estonia was the first European nation to introduce the flat tax. In 2004 the Moderates became the Social Democratic Party, which Ilves left after becoming president.

The President will receive the Foundation's Baltic Statesmanship Award.

Also being honored at the banquet is **Eriks Zunda** one of the first young Latvian public administrators to take advantage of the USBF's municipal exchange program, coming to Washington for a Public Administration course in 1993. He has since risen to the post of Parliamentary Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, and credits his experience in the United States as an important career factor. Zunda, 57, received a degree from Riga Technical University in 1973, served in the army for two years, then returned to the university as a postgraduate student, teacher, and research associate. He will be given the Distinguished USBF Exchange Program Alumnus Award

The Baltic Corporate Citizen Award will go to the Estonian state energy company – **Eesti Energia**. The utility is the largest energy company in the

Baltics, and through the imaginative leadership of **Sandor Liive**, 38, chairman of the company's Management Board, has emerged as one of the best managed and productive energy enterprises in the region. The main raw material for energy production – oil shale – is extracted from mines owned by the company, a resource that the Soviet Union had used to provide electric power for the former Leningrad and much of the Soviet northwest. Eesti Energia is also involved in the construction and maintenance of other energy systems, and has called on Estonian Research and Development institutes and technology intensive companies, possibly with partners abroad, to find better and alternative ways for power generation that save energy, and thus the environmental resources of the Baltic area.

Chef **Martins Ritins**, 58, who prepare the meal for the gathering, was born to Latvian exile parents in England. He served as chef of restaurants in Toronto, Montreal, Montego Bay, London, and Saudi Arabia before opening his own catering service in New York City. In 1994 Ritins moved to Latvia, and is now the Director and *Chef de cuisine* of Vincents Restaurant in Riga. Ritins has been influential in the International Slow Food movement, and is president of Slow Foods Latvia. He will guide the culinary staff at the Mayflower to create authentic Latvian meals for the more than 500 guests.