

NEWS

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The U.S. Baltic Foundation

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

Some of the world's most creative, innovative, and beautiful people are coming to Washington D.C. next weekend – April 17-19. The silent auction reception and dinner will be held on Saturday, April 19, from 6:00- 10:00 pm at the Mayflower Hotel at 1127 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC.

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 Estonia's President.

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 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**.

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. Please go to www.usbaltic.org for more information.

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. 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.

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

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.

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.

In New York, 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.

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' 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.

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.

For more information or to set up interviews, please call Trevor Dane at (202) 785-5056, or 202-340-5177 or e-mail at trevor@usbaltic.org.

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