



# Making a Difference

By Robert Duda

**O**NEDAY I RECEIVED A STRANGE REQUEST I from Ginger Houghton who has been the inspiration and driving force behind much of our work in Lithuania. She said a member of the Knights of Lithuania had heard the name "Rugute," a program of some sort that was doing good things in Lithuania. What I learned about the "Rugute" program left me not only impressed but amazed by what people can accomplish in the face of human tragedies.

Edita Abrukauskienė and husband Dainoras Abrukauskas were the parents of a 2 year old daughter, Rugile, who had been diagnosed with a malignant tumor. A two-year fight against the disease proved to no avail and the little girl died on April 10, 2004. On November 29 of the same year, the couple established a fund in the name "Rugute," the diminutive form of Rugile.

I spoke with Edita and asked her why was she doing this and what does she hope to accomplish? She replied that she hoped to spare other families from having to endure an experience similar to theirs. At the time of their daughter's illness, no written information was available to families on the subject of cancer -

whether it be possible treatments, success of such treatments, or their side effects. Additionally the doctors and hospital staff were not forthcoming with information and no real moral support program for the families existed. For poor families financial problems quickly grew as the need for expensive medicines and travel expenses put a severe burden on families that were often just barely making it.

When Edita and Dainoras established "Rugute," their charter was:

1. To provide support for the families — assisting with money for medicines, household and travel expenses. Exploring alternate treatments in foreign locations if necessary.
2. Accumulate information in the Lithuanian language on various cancers and make the information readily available to everyone via the Internet.
3. Fulfill the dreams of these children by providing them with gifts, trips, or the opportunity to meet stars in the sports, media, or other endeavors. Conduct social gathering with the families where moral support, friendships, and the sharing of information could all take place.





OPPOSITE PAGE: Edita Abrukauskiene spends some quality time with cancer patient Aiste. TOP: A recent gathering of patients and their families supported by the fund. ABOVE: Edita and patient Samanta last Christmas.

supported by the Japanese-Lithuanian Friendship Association which donated funds to Kaunas University Hospital for monitoring equipment. They have arranged for and sent children for cancer treatment in France, Canada, Turkey, and Russia.

Edita and Dainoras have a group of volunteers that assists them with family visits, fund solicitations, language translations, and non-monetary donations. The "Rugute" fund organizes large scale family gatherings for the children and their families. The first gathering in October 2006 was attended by over 30 families and nearly 100 people. A second gathering in June 2007 attracted 150 people. Edita indicated this is to become an annual event.

While visiting Lithuania this February, Edita was proud to show me her latest addition to the "Rugute" program. They have rented a town-house within view of Santariskes Hospital in Vilnius. This is to be the "Rugute House" and will be used to provide free lodging for families while their children are undergoing cancer treatments.

In 2006, Edita received the "TVS Lietuvos Garbe" award (humanitarian award). I was honored to be asked to present the award to Edita at a ceremony attended by President and Mrs. Adamkus and other luminaries. Edita was asked during the ceremony if she had one wish, what would it be? She replied that she wished that someday all the cancer wards in all the hospitals in Lithuania would be empty of the children they now contain.

The entire "Rugute" fund is run by non-paid volunteers who are working with donations only. In three short years Edita and Dainoras have turned their personal tragedy into a symbol of hope for families in every part of Lithuania. They truly are "Making a Difference."

Information on making donations to the "Rugute" fund is available on their website, [www.rugute.lt](http://www.rugute.lt), or you can contact Robert Duda, 23 Conway Rd., Haydenville, MA 01039. Phone: 413-665-3196; email: [robmduda@comcast.net](mailto:robmduda@comcast.net). LH

**Ginger Houghton** and **Robert Duda** are both retired Lt. Colonels from the Air National Guard. Ginger is a Certified Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA). Robert was a full time officer. Together they were responsible for shipping 48 containers of medical supplies to Lithuanian hospitals. Ginger is from Schenectady, New York. Robert is from Whately, Massachusetts.

It is one thing to develop a plan on what you would like to do - quite another to actually make it happen.

How successful has the "Rugute" fund been in three short years? Very successful is a true understatement!

They are currently in contact with about 50 families and continue to assist them based on need and the health status of the children. Edita has an open phone line to the families regardless it be day or night. They are free to call anytime with questions or just for moral support.

They have established a website, both in Lithuanian and English which has information on cancer as well as details on the children including numerous photos. People are also able to participate in a chat room format. This is one of the best, most comprehensive sites I have ever seen. Check it out!!

Through the Lithuanian embassies, they have made contacts with similar organizations in Russia, Sweden, France and Turkey. The "Rugute" fund has been