

## To Lithuania, With Love

By Charles Jacobs

A developer returns to his homeland to help restructure its troubled economy.

**A**fter designing and constructing more than a billion dollars in buildings and industrial parks in the U.S., Vytautas "Victor" Paulius has embarked on an unusual trans-Atlantic mission.

An American citizen since 1959 who was raised in Lithuania, Paulius is temporarily back in his native land to launch a development program he devised to repay both nations for what he considers his "exceptionally fortunate life."

When the veil of Communism was lifted from the Baltic states in 1990, the Allendale-based developer was asked by the Lithuanian government to help guide the restructuring of its shattered economy. Using New Jersey's enterprise zones and the Mount Olive free trade zone as models, Paulius spear headed the conversion of the port of Klaipeda into an international free trade zone. It is one of the only ports in the region that never freezes, and Klaipeda's location makes it an ideal distribution point for goods being transhipped to Scandinavia, Russia and central Europe.

Invited to become the prime developer, Paulius was given a 99-year lease on 2,500 acres of choice land at the port. The most recent change of government in the fledgling democracy has slowed the overall project, but Petras Anusas, Lithuania's Consul General in the U.S. insists it is "still very much alive and on our agenda because it has the potential of bringing real investment into the country and producing so many needed jobs."

Paulius wants to bring the kind of success he has realized through V. Paulius & Associates, the company he founded in 1967 and built into a multi million dollar design, development and construction organiza-



tion, to his homeland. "The country is in desperate need of economic growth, but after years of Communism the government is understandably shy about such a large undertaking, and its officials are naive in how to go about making it happen, Paulius says. "Those of us Lithuanians who have been lucky enough to experience a free capitalistic society have an obligation to demonstrate the real benefits of economic progress."

Paulius is currently in Klaipeda supervising construction of the port's first new building, a 90,000-sq.-ft. cold storage refrigeration facility. The much needed freezer will help Lithuania's booming fishing industry meet heavy demand. Refrigerated box cars on loan from the national railroad system have previously been used for storage, but have proved inadequate.

The freezer project illustrates how Paulius plans to repay his debt to both his native and his adopted country. Most of the building materials are shipped from New Jersey to Lithuania. "That way we produce jobs for American workers in manufacturing and transporting materials, while providing on-site construction jobs for Lithuanians," Paulius

explains. He is organizing a team of Lithuanian architects and engineers, who will be supervised and further trained on-site in Klaipeda by technology hookups from the home office in Allendale.

Because of his ties to the Lithuanian government, Paulius is the logical choice to serve as contractor on any buildings in the new trade zone. He also has experience marketing overseas distribution centers to major American corporations. Officials from his company are meeting next month with representatives of the World Bank, who may want to help finance development in the zone. Philip Morris has already begun construction on a new cigarette factory there.

The Lithuanian development project is a work in progress, and the challenge now is to keep the momentum going. Because the project is so large, Anusas says, "It really depends on creative people like Mr. Paulius to convince the new government to go full steam ahead."