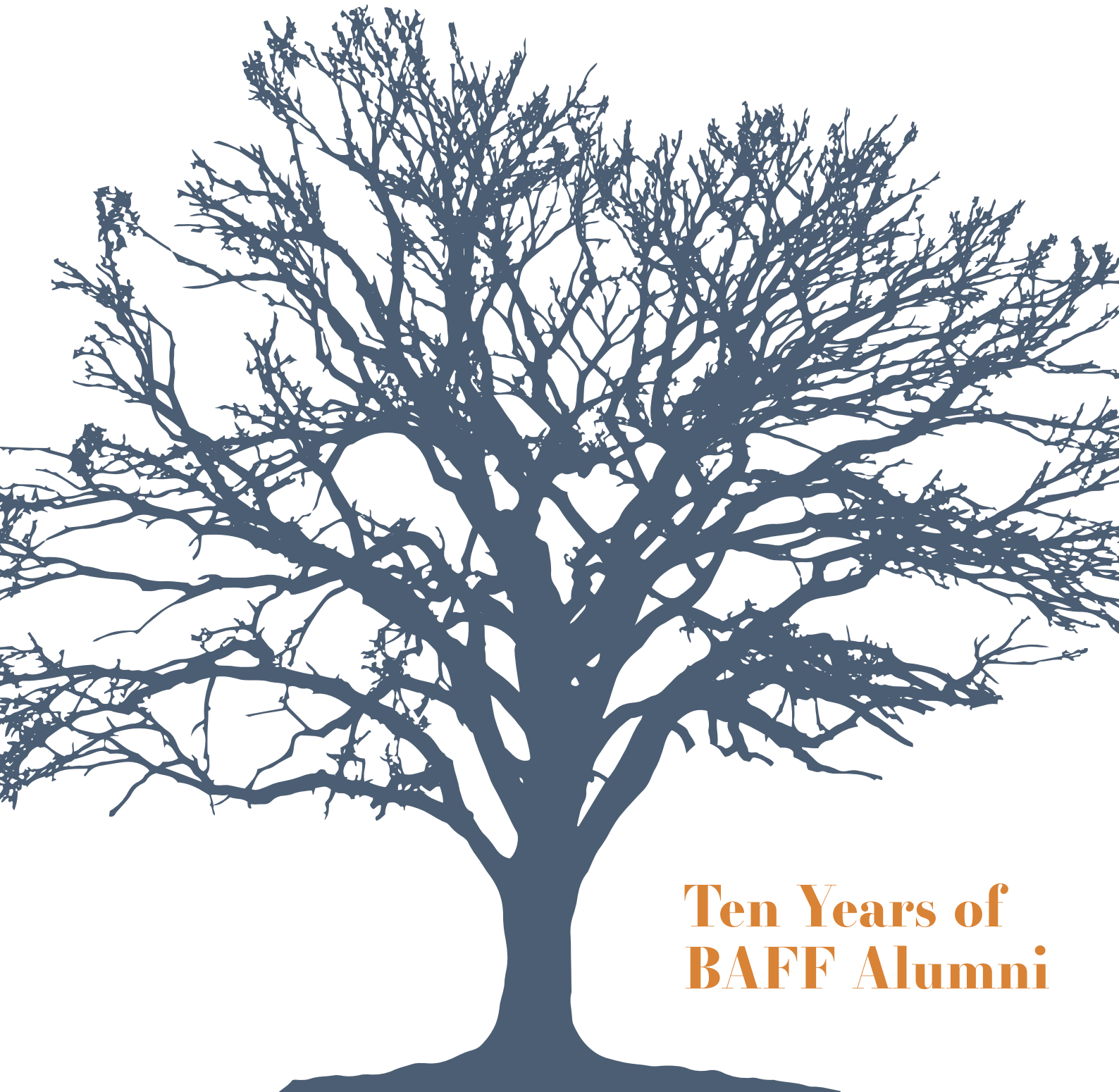




Baltic-American Freedom Foundation



**Ten Years of
BAFF Alumni**

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RĪGA, LATVIA

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To the Baltic-American Freedom Foundation Community:

Since the first BAFF Alumni returned from the United States in 2012, we have watched with pride and humility as alumni have contributed their expertise, experience, and energy to achieving the mission envisioned when the Baltic-American Enterprise Fund Board of Directors founded BAFF in 2010.

As we honor ten years of BAFF alumni and activities, we are proud to highlight a few of the many that exemplify support of our mission “to deepen the ties between and among Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the United States through programs of education and exchange centering on economic growth and democratic values.” Here are stories of BAFF alumni leaders representing the creativity, innovation, and citizen diplomacy inspired by BAFF exchanges.

Our enduring legacy is found in those who have completed research, education, professional internships, and leadership development through BAFF Scholarships. From the outset, BAFF has sought to fulfill its mission by creating a vibrant alumni network of professionals with strong ties to each other and to the United States, equipped with the skills and experience to lead Baltic business, educational institutions, and social enterprises. We would also like to honor the work

Co-Chairs, BAFF Board of Directors



Danguole Spakevicius Altman



Richard Sheridan

Founding Director and Chairman, 2010-2021

of Baltic organizations who hosted American professionals for speeches, professional development, and master class performances. These reciprocal exchanges have contributed to Baltic-American understanding that is more important now than ever.

For over 10 years, BAFF benefited from Kim's extraordinary leadership and vision, from the formative programs to our present alumni body over 700 strong. During his tenure as Chairman, Mr. Davis was conferred two prestigious awards. At the May 2019 State Awards ceremony, the President of the Republic of Latvia Raimonds Vējonis appointed Mr. Davis a Commander of the State, Cross of Recognition, for his continuous work to strengthen ties between the United States and Latvia. And in 2021, H.E. Audra Plepytė presented Mr. Davis with the Order for Merits to Lithuania, Cross of the Knight.



Alumni council

The alumni community offers access to unique events and activities focused on social activities, giving back, and opportunities for professional and leadership development. Members of the Alumni Council, representing Professional Internship, Research Scholar, Graduate Scholar, and Leadership Academy alumni, design and implement alumni programming to promote a vibrant, engaged alumni community. BAFF Directors Asta Sendonaris and Andres Trink, co-chairs of the Board of Directors Alumni Affairs Committee, support the work of the Alumni Council.

Program Development Committee

Dāvis Freidenfelds, Leadership Academy 2014
Līna Menjoka, Professional Internship 2014
Viktorija Vaštakaitė-Kairienė, Research Scholar 2020

Program Development Committee
Chair: Katheriin Liibert, Professional Internship 2014

Alumni Engagement and Marketing Committee

Henrijs Kaļķis, Research Scholar 2018
Rokas Mackevičius, Professional Internship 2019
Triin Metsla, Professional Internship 2019
Zane Paula, Professional Internship 2014

Chair Justinas Lapienis Graduate Scholar 2016

“

“Ever-growing in numbers, the community of BAFF Alumni is a diverse, well-educated, and ambitious group of young professionals. I believe there is potential in the Alumni community that we can still unlock.”

Katheriin Liibert

“

“Community and vibrant networks are among the most powerful forces for positive societal and personal impact. I believe that shared goals and value of the BAFF community are among the cornerstones towards mature and vibrant Baltic states.”

Justinas Lapienis

Event Management, Financial Planning and Oversight Committee

“

Through my participation in the Council I would like to learn how to see, hear, and feel what is needed for each and every member of the BAFF community and develop my skills to bring these needs together for the common good.”

Ilona Markunaite

Lauris Grāvelis, Professional Internship 2013
Rūta Labalaukytė, Professional Internship 2014
Rõõt Palmiste, Professional Internship 2018

Chair: Ilona Markunaite, Professional Internship 2012

BAFF ambassadors

All BAFF alumni returning from the U.S. serve as BAFF Ambassadors, an opportunity to build meaningful relationships with fellow alumni, as well as to connect with BAFF in a personal way. BAFF Ambassadors assist with BAFF events, serve on task forces for specific activities, represent BAFF at international education events, and review applications and marketing materials.



Creativity.

Alberts Viegliņš

What will Alberts Viegliņš do next? At 32, he has already competed as a professional snowboarder in European and World Championships, started two successful board sports businesses – the first, producing skimboards, founded with his dad when he was only twelve – and co-developed and directed a popular TV show on the largest streaming service in Latvia.

One theme runs through all of Alberts's accomplishments – capturing the sensibility of his generation.





As a young adult snowboarder, he was drawn to the cutting-edge urban look of the clothes and equipment design. When he founded Lokal Boards, his second board business, he designed skateboards that picked up the visual aesthetic of the early 70s. With Lokal Boards growing into Lokal House, a central Riga bar, café and event place, he now defines his success more by the connections created among the community of friends who hang out there than the money they spend.

In 2017, as Alberts was finishing his Master's degree in Design from the Arts Academy of Latvia, the BAFF Professional Internship Program staff in Portland, Maine tracked down a position for him in Los Angeles at Poseidon Paddle and Surf, sending him off on a longstanding dream. He found an apartment a five-minute bike ride from Venice Beach Boardwalk, worked designing T-shirts, webpages and surfboards, made friends from all over the world and surfed nearly every day.



The background of the image is a close-up of a light-colored wood grain, showing various patterns of concentric and wavy lines in shades of beige and tan. The texture is natural and organic.

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One theme runs through all of Alberts’s accomplishments – capturing the sensibility of his generation.

Julija Frodina

As a young child, Julija Frodina spent long days at her grandfather's workshop in Vilnius, watching him make shoes by hand. She loved everything about it – the smell of leather, the silence that pervaded the room, the relaxed approach he took to this work he so obviously loved. To her, that grimy workshop felt as magical as a princess's castle.

More than two decades later, in New York City on her BAFF Professional Internship Program, Julija, now a shoemaker herself, could be found doing almost exactly the same thing in her off-hours. First, she visited an 85-year-old woman in her top floor sewing machine-filled Soho studio, working alone. The woman shared stories about making shoes for Broadway dancers and directed Julija to the city's best stores to purchase leather and shoemaking tools. Later, Julija visited two sisters from Belarus in their tiny workshop in Chinatown. For a few months, Julija traveled to the shop two or three evenings a week, to talk with them in Russian and learn their shoemaking techniques. She loved those places that evoked her childhood and taught her more about her passion of creating innovative shoes.

During her work days in New York, Julija interned at the top-quality casual fashion brand, Rag & Bone, a perfect





match for her interests. She drew sketches of shoes and accessories and made corrections in Italian and Chinese product prototypes. When she had learned as much as she could there, she found a second internship for her last six months in the U.S. at Vida Shoes, a larger business that manufactured shoes for multiple designers. Vida exposed Julija to the operational side of the shoemaking business – she drew technical sketches, learned about production and chose items for collections. Between the two opportunities, she built a strong understanding of how to run her own fashion brand.

Even considering all her work, New York was about fun for Julija too. While she lived in tiny apartments in Brooklyn and Manhattan with various roommates over the course of the year, she was often out and about. She bonded with the half dozen other BAFF interns in the city that year and they visited museums, galleries and jazz clubs together. And her own work gained attention – she presented her clothes and shoe collection at Bushwick’s Open Studios and was invited to create costumes for a Manhattan contemporary dance festival in New York. She felt so lucky – BAFF had given her the best year of her life.

When Julija returned to Lithuania from New York, she wanted to avoid a big letdown so she immediately started her Master degree in product design in Vilnius Academy of Arts. Building on all she learned in her internships and with her shoemaker friends while in the U.S., she focused her studies on creating conceptual shoes, eventually producing a 3D printed shoe that a person could actually wear. The white plastic angular shoe proved a dramatic success – it garnered awards, was displayed in a museum and included in exhibits, and led to an offer for Julija to study at an elite fashion design school in the Netherlands. Most important, the accolades that awkward shoe brought her strengthened her belief in herself.



In the last few years, Julija has not slowed down in her commitment to emulate her grandfather in his work ethic and the beautiful shoes he produced. With a friend from art school, she started the “Between” project, a Vilnius-based fashion company that makes shoes, clothes and hats. For three years, Between fashion was shown in the Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter Fashion Weeks in Paris and, at its peak, the company distributed products to twelve shops around the world. While Between’s business has been slowed by the Covid-19 pandemic, Julija continues to focus her work on the values she considers most important – spreading innovative design and sustaining the traditional craft of shoemaking, a priority that began so many years ago in her grandfather’s shop.





Fred Truus

Fred Truus has taken a little-known – and, some say, dying – art form, blacksmithing, and brought it to life in Estonia. With degrees in blacksmithing at the vocational, bachelor’s and master’s levels, he is definitely not making horseshoes or swords. He is creating oversized, simple, unique, sculptures – a 10 foot tall spinning seed from stainless steel, for example, or a 30 foot long earthworm; each produces an audible WOW when seen. Many of his pieces come with a polished finish so they reflect back a viewer’s body, creating an immersive artistic experience.

With BAFF covering most of his expenses as part of the Graduate Scholar program, Fred started as a Fulbright scholar and received a degree from Southern Illinois University (SIU), the US’s only graduate artist blacksmithing program. Today, he is actively repaying the contribution. He has brought many ideas – or, as he calls it, enlightenment – back to Estonia, both from his classroom experience at SIU and his lived experiences in the States. He passes those perspectives on, sharing them with the students he teaches at The Estonian Academy of Arts or in his studio, and bringing them to 3D form in the pieces he creates.

Already successful, winning three commissions for Estonian public art pieces in his six-year career, Fred’s focus remains on the original idea, his collaboration with fellow artists and the process of creation. Perhaps one day he will have private installations of his steel visions all over the world, but right now he is happy as a teacher, community builder, father and creator.



Regita Zeiła

One word could describe Regita Zeiła's experience on BAFF's Professional Internship Program – diversity. In her nine months in the U.S., she learned and experienced something new almost every day.

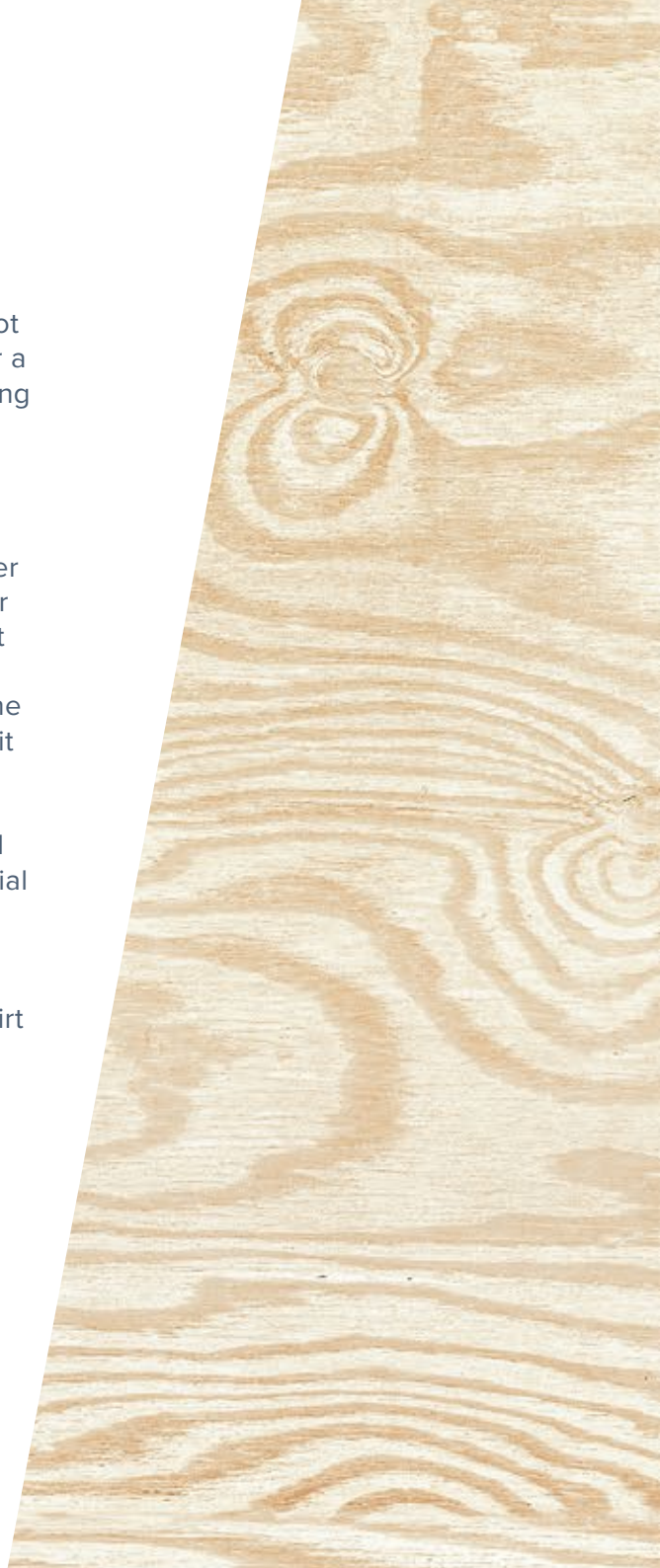
She prioritized finding an internship related to her biggest passion, social entrepreneurship, and the BAFF team in Portland, Maine came through, finding her a position at the IXL Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, an accelerator for innovative start-ups, where she worked on three different projects: strategy development for a university in Colombia, a student competition program for Verizon and a Boston-based NGO that fights income inequality among all races. Moreover, her colleagues came from all over the world: her boss was Indian but grew up in Zambia while her co-workers were from Guatemala, Russia, Venezuela, and even a few were from the U.S.

Outside of work, she and her husband, who had joined her for her time in the U.S., shared a home with a Chinese family who they made dinners with and still are in touch. They also traveled to at least twenty states, on both the east and west coasts and as part of a road trip from Chicago to New Orleans, straight down the center of the country. They stayed in Airbnb's wherever they visited – with an anthropology degree, Regita found it fascinating to learn the personality of each state, city and even neighborhood through the homes she rented and the people she met.

Most important, she was exposed to new ideas and perspectives while in America. She was struck by the openness of the people who would immediately share stories about their families and personal lives. And in work settings, she found it refreshing that hierarchy was often not important, finding herself having casual conversations over a meal with top executives from companies she was consulting for.

All of what she saw and learned changed her life. In the U.S., she built her self-confidence, expanded her horizons, developed a wider vision of the world around her and of her own career goals, and learned the tremendous value of her home in the Latgale region of Latvia. All of this she brought back to her work as the Executive Director of the Social Entrepreneurship Association of Latvia (SEAL), work that she had committed to when she was an 11-year-old girl on a visit to Riga, shopping at the Otra Elpa – Second Breath in English – charity boutique, whose profits serve the community. She started at SEAL as a volunteer and worked her way up to the top job where she supports member social enterprises through advocacy, capacity building and information-sharing.

Today, Regita embodies the philosophy written on the T-shirt she received at her BAFF enrichment trip in Nashville: Be Part of Something Bigger Than Yourself. Her childhood commitment to changing the world has not abated. She, along with so many BAFF alumni she is connected to, are helping transform the Baltics, socially and economically.



Raivo Sell

Raivo Sell is hard at work creating our future. Through his robotics program at Tallinn University of Technology (TalTech), he leads the autonomous vehicles group with a team of six PhD students and researchers. While most universities around the world are creating prototypes of autonomous vehicles, Raivo and his team, with generous university and corporate funding and using inexpensive open-source software, have gone one step further: they have developed a fully functional self-driving mini-bus. They're now testing it with passengers and pedestrians, determining levels of both acceptance and demand, along with tweaking its design



based on local geography – e.g. ensuring its prepared for snow on the road in Estonia or alligators in Florida.

Self-driving vehicles seem to have been Raivo's destiny from childhood. Before he was a teenager, he was fascinated by both motorcycles and the first computers available in Estonia – his research work today brings these disciplines together. And his six-month BAFF Research Scholar program nurtured that passion. In 2019, he traveled to Florida Polytechnic Institute near Orlando to work with academic colleagues and municipal leaders in Florida, North and South Carolina and California. He gave presentations on his own research, developed partnerships and signed a memorandum of collaboration on autonomous vehicle research with Florida Polytechnic and TalTech in the Estonian Ambassador's Washington DC office.

Vehicles were not just of professional interest while Raivo was on his BAFF program. He, his wife and his three children, who had joined him in the U.S., traveled around the country in a tan Lincoln Town car, which he purchased for its large trunk, adequate to carry all their luggage. He also shipped two other American cars he bought back to Estonia: a Pontiac Fiero for his research team to convert to electric power, and a white Corvette C4 sports car, purely for his own fun.

Raivo's BAFF experience brought him professional relationships in the U.S. that are thriving today – he and his American colleagues are holding weekly research meetings and working together on a fall conference, jointly produced by universities in Florida, South Carolina and Tallinn. BAFF's impact lives on into our future through Raivo.



The background of the image is a close-up of a light-colored wood grain, showing wavy, concentric patterns in shades of beige and tan. The texture is natural and organic.

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**Remember that –
No one is you, and that is
your power, so use that
power!**



Liisi Org

Liisi has always been an ambitious individual. It all started when she was a small girl and told her father that she'll probably take over his business one day. During Liisi's colorful life, her drive to discover and develop herself and the wonderful opportunities that life has to offer has only strengthened.

As an energetic, friendly woman who likes people and believes anything is possible if you work hard enough, Liisi has been a leader with an impressive work ethic since her early teen years. She acquired some work experience already in middle school, but starting high school in a new town in Estonia, she quickly became a student council member, serving on boards and organizing school events. At the University of Tartu Pärnu College, she studied Entrepreneurship and Project Management. During that time she had an opportunity to spend a semester abroad in Madrid, Spain, where she learned how to adapt to multicultural environments and understood how traveling widens the perspective. An internship with the biggest fairs center in Estonia turned into a full-time project assistant's job, which she held while completing her university degree. Then another university recruited her to become their continuing education manager, building their training and development program for adult learners in healthcare; almost simultaneously, she began a Master's degree in education management. At 25, she should have been exhausted but she was just getting started.

While in her Master's program, Liisi learned about BAFF. Maybe an average person, with a rewarding job, master's degree, good salary, and a nice apartment would have resisted but she

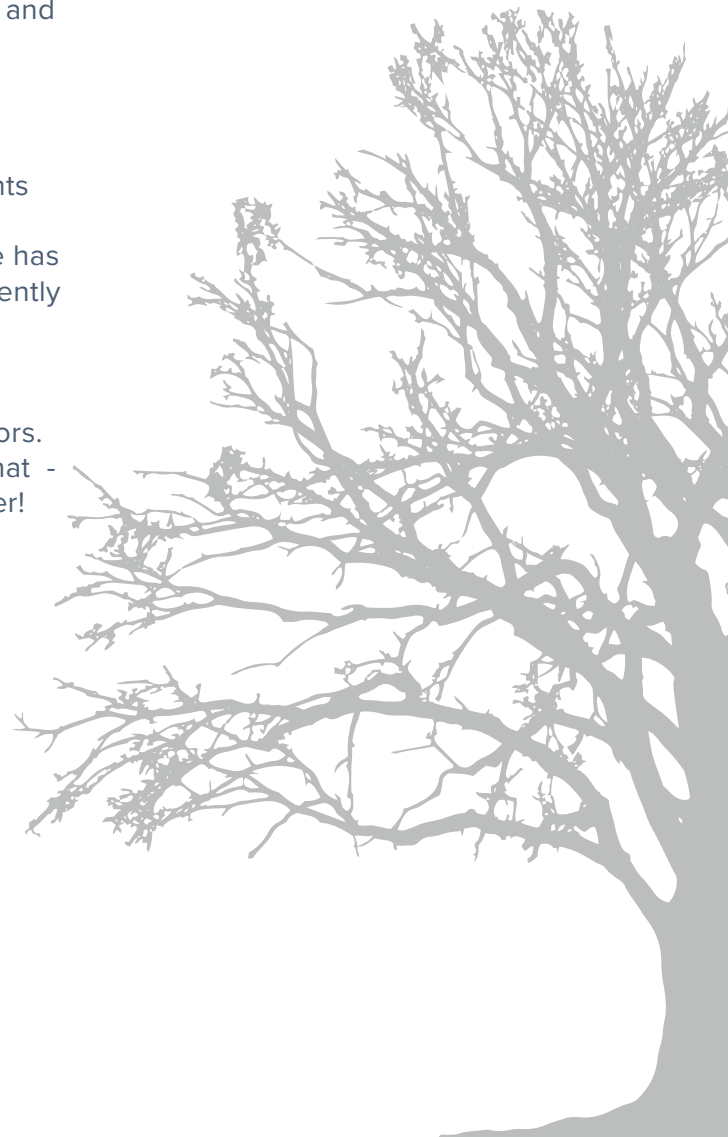
decided to mix things up again. She applied to BAFF's Professional Internship Program and found her own position in ed-tech with Fluent City in New York. On her second day, still getting comfortable speaking English full-time, she found herself assigned to the customer service desk, helping customers schedule their language courses. It was a shocking start but she adapted quickly and within two months had become Fluent City's private lessons coordinator, supporting 500 students and 300 teachers and rebuilding the company's class scheduling system.

Within six months she had acquired all the relevant skills for the job and since Fluent City wasn't able to offer her any more opportunities to grow, she decided to find a new placement. With the help of some great new friends, she found herself in New York University's Edtech Accelerator StartEd. Again she moved with lightning speed from her initial role as an associate to their community manager; in this position, she put on 80 events, both in-person and online, over five months. The highlight of this experience was definitely the biggest Edtech festival on the East Coast - NY Edtech Week, where she coordinated speakers including New York city's Mayor, the U.S. Secretary of Education, and several Broadway singers and was responsible for the Opening Show.

When Liisi returned to Estonia, she was sure she wanted to work in a startup, so she joined Scoro, a business management software company, where she created and managed customer success processes and saw inside the startup life. The need for human connection and building communities remained, so she was eager to contribute to the Techstars Startup Week Tallinn, where she built the Future Founder track and organized the regional events as well. All those experiences leading entrepreneurial

programs, along with a BAFF connection, led to her present role as the Startup Community Development Manager for Startup Estonia, the Estonian government initiative aimed to supercharge the Estonian startup ecosystem. Working with the startup community to inspire their dreams, minimize their roadblocks and connect the right people with each other, has been a perfect fit for her extroverted personality. She's now about to take on the next challenge as the CEO of Latitude59, which is the flagship startup and tech event of the world's first digital society.

She has also been a leader within the BAFF alumni community, serving as president of BAFF's alumni association in Estonia for a year, organizing BAFF events like Sports Games and BAFF thanksgiving dinner, and staying connected to her BAFF network of friends. She has generously given back to the BAFF program (most recently in the alumni mentorship program), which opened her world to incredible opportunities. "Whatever you go through, grows you" is how she describes her life experience and she's excited about her future endeavors. She always reminds herself and others to remember that - no one is you and that is your power - so use the power!



From BAFF intern to Baltic expert—almost overnight

Miina Karafin

Miina Karafin found her chosen profession essentially on a dare, which she gave to herself. When she graduated from high school in Tallinn, she planned to take a gap year in Greece, following in the footsteps of her older sister who had done volunteer work in France. Yet she investigated her options for university at the same time. When she read about a major – construction management – that was both new to her and rumored to be academically challenging, she couldn't resist applying. She wanted to know if her excellent grades in her favorite subjects of math and physics would be enough for her to be admitted, even though she had no intention of attending right away.

But then fate entered in the picture. She got accepted at university, her volunteer program in Greece was cancelled and she enrolled that fall in Tallinn University of Technology (TalTech) as a construction management major. The first year was, as predicted, difficult but by the next year, she could see that she had made the right decision. She loved what she was learning so much that it felt like the field had chosen her.

In the last year of her five-year combined bachelor's/master's program at TalTech, Miina studied abroad at the University of New Mexico in the U.S. and learned about the specialty that would come to define her career: Building Information Modeling (BIM), which allows collaborators to create a 3D model of a building to identify problems and improvements before significant resources have been spent. BIM was new and exciting to Miina – not a technology used in Estonia at the time –





so she wrote her Master's thesis on it. She felt like she had found a focus for her work.

When, upon graduation, she had the chance to apply for the BAFF Professional Internship Program, she knew she wanted to train where she could learn more about BIM, and the U.S. was the very best option. She found an opportunity with Skanska, a construction management company with a focus on BIM and offices in both Tallinn and Boston. She started her internship in 2013 and before long she was running design review meetings and developing a deeper knowledge of the BIM modeling technology.

When back home the following year, Miina was surprised to realize she had leaped from U.S. intern to Estonian expert in this process overnight. With Skanska having closed their Tallinn office, she got offers from two other firms who were hoping to start a BIM operation. She started at Nordecon, one of Estonia's leading construction companies, with responsibility to develop a BIM division; six years later, she has become the company's Chief Technology Officer.

Developing this specific expertise has helped Miina be successful as a woman in a male-dominated industry – she is seen as the person to talk to about BIM, regardless of her gender. And she's an incredible role model for younger women just starting in the construction business. Her career success, of course, has come irrespective of her gender and thanks in great part to her BAFF internship where she learned about BIM, built independence and broadened her perspective, giving her the opportunity to now transform a key industry in her home country.

Mantas Kondratavičius

Since completing his internship at Mistress Creative in Santa Monica, California, Mantas has worked to support Lithuania's innovation ecosystem. He says the lessons learned from his U.S. experience include "Hustle more. Always go the extra mile, but better done than perfect. Success is not the time spent on the project, but rather strategy and planning. However, strategy without execution is hallucination."

Mantas's work and experience gained have affected the trajectory of Lithuanian innovation by drawing more and more people to the conversation and attracting early-stage accelerators and venture capital funds. So far, Lithuania has two official unicorns and a few unofficial ones. And the government has entered into a friendly dialogue with the entrepreneurial community.



Innovation awards

BAFF has recognized Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian innovators through a series of competitive programs with cash awards of 10000 and 5000 euros.

The Innovation Awards are produced in collaboration with the U.S. Embassies in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, along with local partners, including the American Chambers of Commerce in Estonia and Latvia and representatives of the start-up ecosystem.







Albert Zulps

Albert Zulps, Regional Director, Virtual Design and Construction, Skanska USA, has championed multiple BAFF Professional Interns, with a loyal group of mentees in the Baltic construction industry. Albert visited Riga to meet with BAFF alumni, participate in Riga Technical University's Buildsome conference and speak at the 2019 Latvian-American Innovation Awards, where he flew a demonstration drone above the audience.



Citizen Diplomacy & Democratic Values

Anna Ūdre

For a long time, Anna Ūdre was in a hurry. At the age of 15, she was hired at BNS, a Latvian news agency, as a trainee. Soon she was doing her own interviews and developing and writing her first story, about that year's strawberry harvest. As a 17-year-old working with colleagues at a startup news portal, she created an Internet TV show in which she interviewed musicians and actors along with the Speaker of the Latvian Parliament and the former Prime Minister about their love of books. And by the time she was in her first year of university, she had earned a scholarship to visit Thailand and report on the political issues an underdeveloped nation struggles with. Traveling with correspondents from Greece, Bulgaria and Poland among other nations, most more than a decade older than her, and interviewing families affected by industrial pollution, she realized she wanted to make a difference through international journalism.

Although her adolescence had been filled with journalism jobs, she had considered an alternate career, as an actor. In her childhood, she had developed a love for both nature, nurtured during trips to her family's summer home in the Latvian countryside, and for literature and imagination, stoked by her parents' oversized home library and passion for reading. Her love of books expanded into an interest in telling stories, which led to improv theater and several years as a ghoulish character in a local haunted house attraction. But by university, she realized that a journalism career would allow her to fully

experience the lives and experiences of different types of people instead of just embodying them as a character on a stage.

Halfway through university, she heard about BAFF from a friend. She wasn't that interested at first – after all, she was then studying in Sweden and, through her journalism work, had regularly traveled around Europe and built a network of professional contacts. But her friend said, This is different. This is the United States. So Anna applied, was accepted and, despite sadness at leaving her family and community for a full year, she flew to Washington DC immediately after her university graduation.

Her internship, with the Joint Baltic American National Committee (JBANC), wasn't exactly what she had hoped for. She wanted to work for a large American media company, such as Vice News; how could working for an advocacy organization, which promoted Baltic interests in the US, help her journalism career? Yet she quickly realized that her networking and outreach work for JBANC provided her an abundance of contacts in both American and Baltic politics. She also learned how political systems operate, an invaluable insight for any political reporter. And, not surprisingly, she kept her finger in reporting, freelancing for a few Latvian media outlets throughout her time in the U.S.

Her experience at JBANC even gave her a bit of international fame. In 2018, she attended the press conference held by then President Donald Trump with the three Baltic presidents during their joint visit to the U.S. Anna was told beforehand she wouldn't have the opportunity to ask a question due to the large press presence but when President Trump, in a swipe at American reporters, asked Latvia's then President Raimonds Vejonis to choose a better reporter for a question, Anna, egged

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After his speech, Obama looked across the audience and made eye contact with her, one of the very few people not holding a phone aloft trying to take a picture. He called on her and, this time, she was ready with her question.

on by her colleagues, raised her hand. Her only problem: she hadn't prepared a question. Fortunately, when selected, her improv training kicked in and, her voice steady, she asked about Latvian and American business ties. Only when she sat down and tried to film Trump's response did she realize her hands were shaking.

The experience came in handy a few years later when she was at a 300-person event in Berlin with former President Obama as the featured speaker. After his speech, he looked across the audience and made eye contact with her, one of the very few people not holding a phone aloft trying to take a picture. He called on her and, this time, she was ready with her question.

With all this international exposure, Anna seemed destined to become a world-famous global reporter before she turned 30. But with time to reflect during graduate school in France, she realized she wanted to slow down, go back to her roots and live in the countryside, close to her family. Soon after, she received an offer to become the foreign news editor for "Latvian Television," no interview required – she took the job immediately. She started on January 8, 2020, the day Ukraine International Flight 752 was shot down over Tehran; by the time she got home that night, she had reported three stories. Her family and friends predicted she would soon get bored and move on but a year and a half later, she remains happy with her decision. She has taken all she has learned and chosen to make a difference for Latvia, the country she loves.



Tomass Pildegovičs

Tomass Pildegovičs has always lived a life shaped by an international outlook. Born in Riga, Latvia in a multilingual, multiethnic family in the late 1990s, he spent much of his childhood living in Washington DC as the son of a diplomat, broadening his horizons, making friends from around the world and learning new languages. Yet even while living in Washington, he was raised in a patriotic environment that enabled him to maintain a strong bond with his native Latvia. In addition to his regular schooling, he attended and eventually graduated from the Latvian Sunday school in Rockville, Maryland. When he returned to Riga as a teenager with his family, his first challenge was to refresh his Latvian language skills, adapt culturally, and rebuild his network of friends in his home country.

Yet Tomass hasn't just experienced an international lifestyle – even at a young age, he committed to making connections between all types of people and their home countries. His American English teacher-mentor Nancy Schnore at Riga State Gymnasium No.1 exposed him to numerous academic opportunities, including BAFF's Leadership Academy (LA). In 2014, he participated in LA's inaugural class, spending three weeks on Brandeis University's campus outside Boston and a week touring New York City and Washington DC, bonding with students from Lithuania and Estonia, and meeting young people from Ukraine and Israel who were on campus for other academic programs. After returning to Riga and finishing high school, Tomass moved overseas again, this time to the UK, first for bachelor's and master's degrees, and now working





toward a PhD in politics and international relations at Cambridge University. His research focuses on the Baltic states' interest promotion in European foreign and security policy. Simultaneously, he works as a policy assistant for Sandra Kalniete, a Latvian member of the European Parliament, who was a leader of Latvia's independence movement and would later serve as Ambassador, Foreign Minister, and European Commissioner. He cites her as a pivotal mentor during this foundational stage of his professional development.

In recent months, Tomass has gained recognition in Latvia as one of the country's next generation of foreign policy leaders. Since the onset of Russia's brutal, unprovoked war against Ukraine, Tomass has emerged as a popular opinion leader on international security issues, in part due to his easy-going manner as well as the ability to dissect complex arguments in a comprehensible manner. He has also become the only Baltic expert to be selected for the NATO 2030 Global Fellowship – a programme that prepares researchers and policymakers from the NATO Alliance to engage emerging security challenges. At a time when his knowledge and expertise have been most relevant, Tomass has applied his international upbringing, education, and training to provide a fresh perspective on foreign policy in Latvia.

When speaking about his future career aspirations, Tomass is driven by passion, curiosity, and a desire to help address complex international security issues, particularly in the Baltic region. He cares less about the sector that he will work in or the salary he will earn but more about the content of the work he will do – he aspires to pursue a career working for an international organization, such as NATO or the UN, or remain in Latvia to advance his country's interests on the international stage. In any future path that Tomass will choose, one thing is certain – he is sure to share the values he learned during his BAFF LA program, which he tries to emulate: fostering a culture of intellectual freedom and diversity of thought, engaging in socially responsible work, and building an open and inclusive environment.

Through these priorities, Tomass aligns exactly with the BAFF mission – building connections between American and Baltic citizens in an effort to promote democracy and strengthen the transatlantic relationship for decades to come.

Baltic-American Security Exchange

The BASE program supports national security enhancement efforts by the Baltic states, consistent with the BAFF mission and based on an unwavering commitment by the United States to Baltic security. Funded projects facilitate the exchange of critical knowledge and establish useful contacts between Baltic and U.S. security experts.

The National Defence Foundation of Lithuania

Through the National Defence Foundation of Lithuania, Col. Vaidotas Malinionis has hosted multiple American experts through Baltic-American Security Exchange funding. Focused on civilian resilience in defense of democracy, he has built an organization with the lofty ideal to help the European continent maintain global peace – an enduring and critical mission.

Lennart Meri Conference 2022

BAFF funding supported the invitation of American security experts to participate in the International Centre for Defence and Security's Lennart Meri Conference 2022, "Tempus Fugit—Time Flees".

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Col. (ret)

Vaidotas Malinionis

Col. Vaidotas Malinionis's commitment to democracy in the Baltics is in his blood, even in his name. His father's family supported the anti-Soviet movement in Lithuania in the mid-20th century and his mother was detained by Soviet forces at that time, spending 13 years exiled in Siberia and only allowed back to Lithuania upon Stalin's death in 1953. His father was so impressed with one of his fellow freedom fighters, whose name was Vaidotas, that he decided to pass the name on to his son. As a result, Vaidotas's calling was to carry on the fight for freedom.

That obligation started with Vaidotas's career in the Lithuania military, serving as an officer for 25 years. Then, as he was about to retire in 2014, Russia invaded Ukraine and he felt he needed to step up as his family had more than 50 years earlier. He partnered with fellow military officers, journalists, academics and business leaders to establish the non-partisan National Defense Foundation of Lithuania (NDFL), with a goal of building regional security and supporting democracy.

Within less than a year, NDFL had organized its first security conference, financed in part by BAFF funding through the Baltic-American Dialogue program. That year, three security experts from the U.S. traveled to Lithuania to speak, recruited through Vaidotas's political connections in the Baltics as well as his contacts

developed as a student in the U.S. – first at the United States Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and later at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island.

The NDFL security conference has continued each year, with the 2021 conference going virtual due to the Covid-19 pandemic, yet still garnering more than 400 registrants. The event in 2022 is scheduled to be three days long with attendees including politicians, students, journalists, security experts and decision makers who hope to build knowledge and connections. Today, the Jamestown Foundation, CEPA and other think tanks partner with NDFL on conference curriculum, and NATO's Public Diplomacy Division as well as the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and private defense firms provide funding. In addition, BAFF has continued to contribute consistent support.

Vaidotas's lofty yet simple idea in 2014 – to build an organization that would help the European continent maintain global peace – has proved durable. At six years old, NDFL is healthy and growing. Its projects are known both regionally and globally and it has built an excellent network of security experts as well as shared knowledge among hundreds of professionals interested in Baltics security.

With BAFF's support, Vaidotas feels they have achieved success; as he notes, the more cooperation the Baltics have with America, the less they will associate with Russia. A good thing for democracy in the Baltics, and around the world.



Baltic-American Dialogue

The Baltic-American Dialogue program fosters the exchange of ideas between the Baltic states and the U.S., stimulating international collaboration. With BAFF funding, Baltic public organizations host American speakers on topics of mutual importance and interest.

The Lithuanian public organization AVAKA (Audiovisual Works Copyright Association) received a Baltic-American Dialogue grant to host Neil Landau, an American scriptwriting and filmmaker, who gave the keynote address at their 2019 conference and conducted master classes for student scriptwriters.

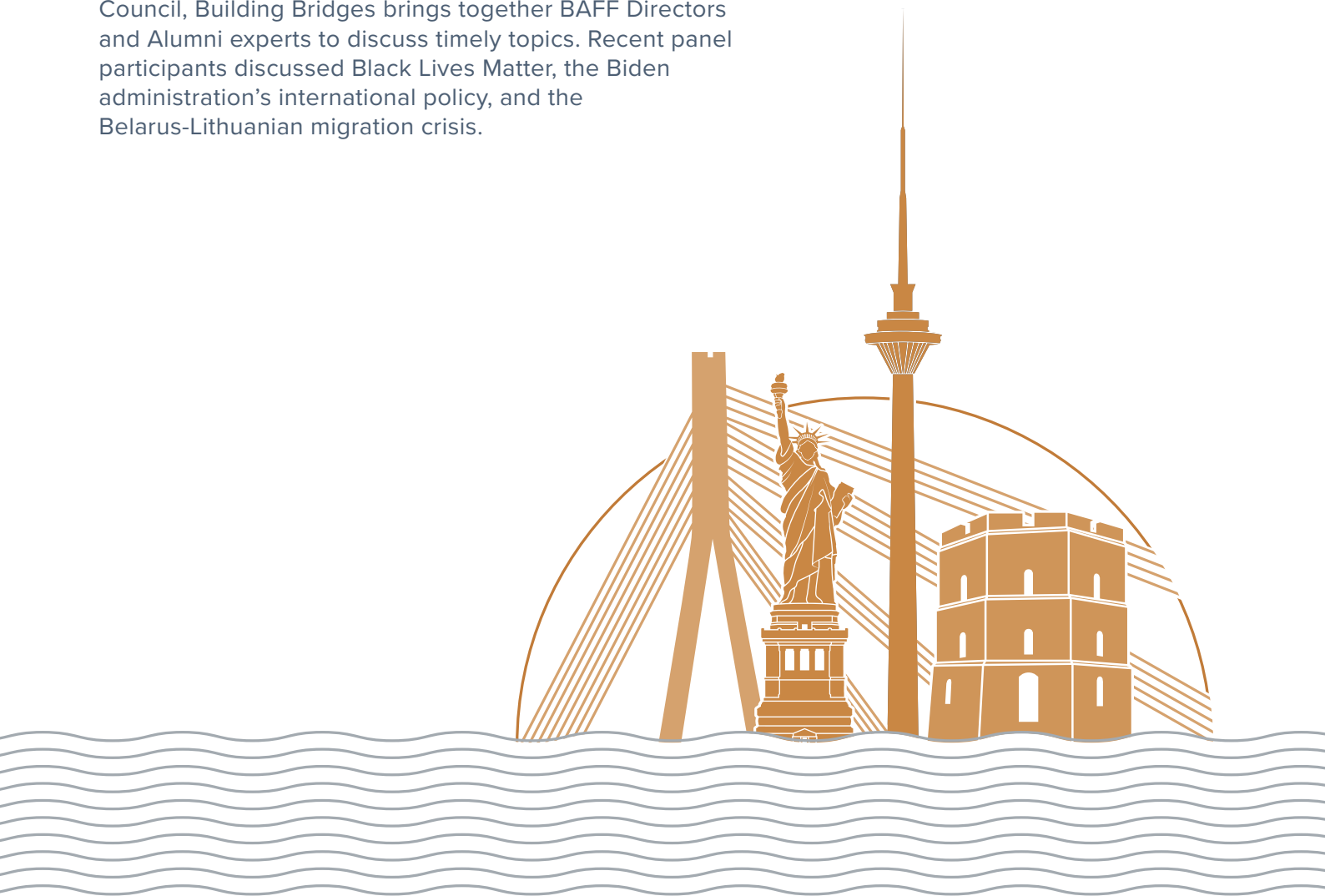
The laboratory “Narva-Detroit: Post-Industrial Cities on the Border—Where To?” brought together the Narva community with international guests from Detroit, as well as from neighboring cities.

With Baltic-American Dialogue funding, the Library Association of Latvia hosted American expert to speak to its 500 members on “Sustainable Library Services” at the 2022 Festival of Latvian Libraries.



Building Bridges

A program initiated and organized by the BAFF Alumni Council, Building Bridges brings together BAFF Directors and Alumni experts to discuss timely topics. Recent panel participants discussed Black Lives Matter, the Biden administration's international policy, and the Belarus-Lithuanian migration crisis.



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To celebrate its 75th anniversary, CIEE honored as “Champions of International Exchange”, the Baltic-American Freedom Foundation (BAFF) Board of Directors, in recognition of their active support of international education and exchange programs that build bridges of mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the Baltics.



The Baltic-American Freedom Foundation (BAFF) was founded to provide opportunities for citizens of the Baltic states to gain education and professional development through exchanges in the U.S. As the legacy foundation created by the Baltic-American Enterprise Fund (BaAEF), after returning \$25 million to the U.S. Treasury, BAFF was established in 2010 and authorized by USAID to fund educational exchange programs collectively known as BAFF Scholarships.

Facts & Figures

THE BAFF MISSION IS:

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To deepen the ties
between and among
Estonia, Latvia,
Lithuania and the
United States through
programs of education
and exchange centering
on economic growth
and **democratic values.**

Scholarships & Grants

SCOLARSHIPS

356	Professional Internship Program.....	\$10,351,594
27	Graduate Scholars Program 2012-2017.....	\$677,786
67	Research Scholars Program.....	\$2,936,341
198	Leadership Academy.....	\$1,369,285

A W A R D E D

Enrichment Trips for Professional Interns and Research Scholars..... \$413,340

Alumni Programs and Activities..... \$322,437

GRANTS

122 Baltic-American Dialogue..... \$657,757

40 Baltic-American Security Exchange (BASE)..... \$502,994

Innovation Awards..... \$258,916

Other Grants and Awards..... \$586,788

Total Scholarships and Grants (2010-2021)

\$18,077,238

At founding, BAFF selected CIEE: Council on International Educational Exchange, a U.S. NGO to administer its programs and activities. Celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2022:

“

CIEE's mission is to humanize international relations and foster peace through international education and exchange programs that promote intercultural understanding.

Contact BAFF

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