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Latvian Foundation Inc.  
Attn: Mrs. Aija Abene  
219 St. Marks Road  
Toronto, ON M6S 2J1  
CANADA

Subject: Karlis Irbitis Memorial scholarship

Letter of Support for Lauris Mikelsons's application

I am a retired UCLA professor of cultural studies, currently an adjunct professor at California State University, Fresno. From 1996 to 1998, I was a Fulbright lecturer at the University of Latvia, Riga. I first met Lauris in 1997 when he, as a student at the Riga Aviation University, asked to audit my classes at UL to improve his English and to learn more about American culture. When he discovered that I was a pilot, he persuaded me to teach ground school to Latvian licensed and prospective pilots, who were seeking to learn to fly in English, the universal language of air traffic control. At about the same time, he also asked me to mentor his academic and professional career. In doing so, I have become personally acquainted with Lauris's studies, research, and student activities at RAU; his concurrent work at the Latvian Civil Aviation Administration; and his current work at airBaltic Airlines. I am greatly pleased to support his application for this scholarship, because, like Irbitis, Lauris is dedicated to aviation in general, and Latvian aviation in particular.

Stimulated by a year studying aviation at the University of Nebraska, Omaha, Lauris returned to RAU in 1995 to break new ground in studying the human factors affecting aviation operations, the subject of his BA thesis. He also was inspired to start the first student government at RUA, and through it, obtained transportation and living support payments for needy students, influenced the prices and quality of food in the cafeterias, obtained a ban on smoking on university premises, besides organizing many social events for the students. I was particularly impressed with a Career Days program that I attended, which Lauris organized to bring corporations like Proctor & Gamble, Cisco, and General Motors to the university to interview students for future employment.

During his 3 1/2 years working at the Civil Aviation Administration, Lauris was able


to introduce concern for human factors into all areas of pilot regulation, implementing what he was learning in his RAU research and scholarship. He also improved his language skills by translating and adopting aviation regulations into English and developed his communication skills by frequently addressing employees of Latvian airlines and aviation organizations on matters of aviation safety.

This combination of education and work experience led directly to his current position as Flight Standards Administrator at airBaltic Airlines, where he developed and is now maintaining the airline's flight operation manuals. He is also responsible for assuring EU compliance in the Flight Operations department, for overseeing the computer-based control of licensing pilots, for teaching flight crews how to use computers in their work, and for providing appropriate ground school updates for pilots. In this position, he is making a day-to-day contribution to aviation development in Latvia.

I am thoroughly impressed with Lauris's (1) enthusiasm--his willingness to explore, to learn, to organize, to share, and to teach; (2) his intelligence--his ability to grasp complicated ideas and then to articulate them; (3) his energy--both physical and mental--to get things done; (4) his maturity--a self-confident sense of responsibility that he pursues with humility; and (5) his studiousness--examining life thoughtfully, humanely, for its potentialities. Although not a wealthy person, he is rich with capital--human, social, and cultural--and knows how to invest that capital for the advancement of Latvian life and Latvian aviation.

I therefore strongly urge you to award Lauris the Irbitis scholarship.

Sincerely,



Joseph J. Arpad