

AH Alumni Newsletter

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THE NEW YEAR

Galya

We began our thirteenth year at the AH on August 12 when the new teachers arrived. And classes started on September 6. Since adding the extra classroom, we have 28 groups—even without formally advertising our program. According to the first questionnaire we usually administer after the 4th class, our students love the lessons and their teachers. Our new team is adjusting to work at the AH and to their students. All the teachers are working hard to prepare their lessons the best they can and the students greatly appreciate it. The teacher's assistant, the new position we have added this year, is proving to be a great help. Lena Belova, our former secretary, knows the needs of our students and the resources of the AH library. I'm sure that in the years to come she'll become an expert in the methods which work here the best, and it will make the teachers' work easier and even more efficient. (See below.)

Of course, we have problems. One of them is our students continuing to cheat in class and during the tests. We are trying to find ways to minimize this problem. What is funny and frustrating at the same time is that not only school kids cheat, our students who are over 30 and 40 are cheating as well. Is this in the blood of Russian students?

This year we have two second year teachers and two third year teachers. It is really helpful to have returning teachers. They, in some ways better than anybody else, can help the new team to understand the atmosphere of the school, the types of students we have and in general the way we live here.

As most of you know, we have been working in Pokrov at the Kraft Foods chocolate factory for almost three years. Thanks to the income from this project we've been able to do a lot of renovation at the AH. As noted previous

newsletters, we were able to add a new teachers office and a new big classroom in the attic. That made it possible for us to move the library, which was in Alexei's and my office, to the former teachers' office. Now more students can have access to the library and we have more space in our office. It looks much better now. Unfortunately, the classes at the chocolate factory have come to an unexpected end. (We knew this would happen some day. We just didn't expect it to happen right now.) We are looking for new business clients here in Vladimir. We already have some possibilities, but I don't want to talk about them before we know for sure.

As always, we are working hard to provide the best possible programs here at the American Home.

A REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

Ron

As a result of the unexpected end to the program in Pokrov, some things we were planning to do this year are having to be put on hold. This includes purchasing DVD players for each classroom (about \$600 total for four more players), buying two new computers (about \$1,800), and several other things. In short, if anyone out there would like to "sponsor" a DVD player, a computer, or, for example, some new teaching materials (including DVDs), we'd love to hear from you.

A NOTE FROM ALEXEI—I'd Like to.... (Or dreams of a person in a tight corner)

Ron wrote that he wanted me to contribute "a little something" to the AH newsletter and would patiently wait until "inspiration struck" me.

I hate writing. Unfortunately. Even the dearest and closest friends have to wait for my letters for ages. If I could order a miracle I probably should request a "love for writing," so that the people I love and keep thinking about might regularly hear from me—so that I could really compete with Ron and some day win the writing contest.

Ups! Bad idea. If I get addicted to writing I would have no time for other things. So, dear Kira, and David, and Nichole, and Ann, and Nina, and all those others whom I owe lots of notes, please forgive me, but I'm taking my careless wish back. (Even if my writing efforts are magically multiplied, Ron will be the champion, won't he?) I need to think about asking for another magic gift—assuming I'm eligible for any gifts at all.

I'd better wish for Ron to forget about my debt, i.e., my obligation to write "something for the newsletter." Alas! There is no way he will forget. I'll have to send him something if I want to avoid some form of "psychological torture." It's clear I can't write, say, better than Jessica (isn't she a lady of extraordinary gratefulness!?) about the Fulbright seminar. All I can say is that the group—outgoing and flexible, hardworking and eager to learn, marked with a true sense of humor and appreciation—exceeded my greatest expectations. Thank you for generously allowing me to be a "shepherd" of your highly intelligent "flock." By the way, Percy Gurwitch commented recently: "Those Americans were an intelligent group. They perfectly matched the chemistry of the American Home. I very much enjoyed meeting with them!"

So did I! If I were given a "magic wish," I'd like to see the 2004 Fulbright gang again. Ideally all together. preferably here. And not once. And the sooner the better. Maybe it's not so unreal? There's still much to learn about Russia first-hand.

Ron's right. For an unwilling writer like me the newsletter provides a great opportunity to save effort and still write to many people about important things.

Dear old and new friends, THANK YOU for your dear footprints on the pathway of my life!

LOVE,
Alexei

Note: Percy Gerwitsch is a highly respected Professor of Foreign Languages at the Pedagogical University—and Alexei's boss there. His presentations on Soviet and Russian history received the highest praise from the Fulbright group. (See below.)

SOME COMMENTS FROM THE STAFF—AND ONE STUDENT

Note: For information about the current teachers, go to: www.serendipity-russia.com/newteachers.htm

A Note from the Lead Teacher Sarah Rorimer

Feeling myself somewhat of a veteran after a year of living and teaching in Vladimir, I returned to the AH not fully realizing the impact that could be made by a changing of the guard. In addition to the five first-year teachers, there are several other major changes that have affected daily work routines. For one, the new teacher's office (AKA the "clubhouse") fosters a more communal work atmosphere. Now that the four internet-connected computers, teaching materials, copier, futon, and cubby-boxes [lockers for each teacher] are conveniently located in the same fenestrated room, the attic is a buzzing bazaar. While fitting nine teachers into the old basement office was a clown-car circus act, the new space accommodates everyone quite nicely, even during lesson planning rush hour. As well as having a change in the work location, as Galya mentions, we also have a new position: Teacher's Consultant.

Lena Belova's return to the AH has greatly smoothed the usual bumps encountered by first-year teachers. Lena's training as an English teacher and knowledge of the AH resources and protocol bring fresh insight to the teachers. During the day, Lena offers one-on-one consultations to discuss lesson plans, she finds supplementary materials for grammar points, and organizes our new expanded library. She understands English grammar from a Russian learner's perspective and can both anticipate potential problems for our students and offer professional advice on presenting the grammar. It is wonderful that Lena can work directly with the teachers. The only problem is that we wish she could be around even more often! (See Lena's comments below.)

In August, we were graced by yet another old time favorite who aptly timed her return visit to Vladimir during the three week AH Orientation. Nina Zaragoza and her son Derek were in town. Nina provided three inspiring workshops for the teachers on lesson planning, presenting new grammar and language, and using books and video in class. She shared fun ideas with us for using journals, songs, poetry and literature in our classes, and taught us how to exploit texts, using them for their maximum language content. Nina's workshops were especially useful because of her past experience and knowledge of the AH. Already, every teacher has implemented her ideas in some way! We do hope that she will return to assist with AH Orientation in years to come.

All in all, the year has gotten off to a good start. The teachers are settling in to the lesson planning and teaching routine and getting used to the workings of the AH. Already we are looking forward to Halloween, November Break and some substantial SNOW!

Note: The first major snowfall came on Halloween.

A Note from Lena Lena Belova

Some of you might remember that I was the AH receptionist, and that I had started working with students before I left for maternity leave a year and a half ago. I returned in August to work part-time directly with the teachers. Now I'm the teachers' assistant/consultant/advisor—or the "tenth teacher" (as the current teachers refer to me). This is a new position at the American home—but it has already proved effective.

Over the years, many of the teachers at the AH have felt the need for a person who could help with planning lessons, ESL teaching techniques, classroom management, finding supplementary materials, and dealing with obstacles inexperienced ESL instructors may encounter. But, according to Galya, it was very difficult to find a suitable person to provide this assistance.

Why am I filling this position? First, my diploma is in teaching English; second, I have some experience observing AH classes; third, with a young son to take care of I need a part-time job with a flexible work schedule (flextime); fourth, I have a strong desire to contribute directly to the AH English program—and I'm eager to learn. In other words, I'm more or less qualified for the position, and it nicely fits my needs and interests. :

After all the teachers arrived the middle of August we began the orientation workshops where we as usual discussed teaching-related issues. We worked on the best ways to present vocabulary and grammar, shared teaching tricks, and pretended we were students for full-length lesson presentations by the new teachers. My role at that time was more as a "student" than a teacher. It was especially helpful to have Nina Zaragoza available to give presentations. We all learned a lot. It provided a solid foundation for further fruitful work and cooperation. (I gave an informal presentation on the supplementary materials, the organization of the new library, and the textbooks we use.)

When classes started the beginning of September, I began to help the teachers directly. Lesson planning during the first classes is the most time and energy-consuming activity. We worked on the first 4 lesson plans together. Before the teachers get to know their students they can't anticipate the possible difficulties or anticipate the time needed for each lesson. This is the period when my help is especially valuable.

Now that the teachers feel more comfortable in the classroom and have gotten to know their students' weaknesses and strengths, when we meet individually we often begin class preparation with a review of the previous class—what did and did not work, what might be improved, etc. We then move on to planning the next lesson.

In addition to helping the new teachers in particular with structuring their lessons, I often help to find supplementary materials. Thanks to the materials collected over the years—especially with the help of previous teachers—our only problem is working through all the available materials in order to find what will work best for that lesson. (We of course will always appreciate any new materials former teachers—and others—might send us. As those of you who have taught here know, there is always a need for new, fresh readings and other materials—and interesting ideas.)

As I become more familiar with what we already have here at the AH, finding the best supplemental materials should become easier—and it should become easier for me to help the teachers in other ways too.

I also am in charge of the library. The AH library, which, as noted, is now located in the old teachers' office in the basement, is also my office. It is much more convenient for the students and the teachers to borrow books and magazines now than when the library was in Galya's office. All library items are organized by categories—and eventually they will be in alphabetical order within each category.

Come and see for yourselves how much the American home working area has changed for the better—and the other improvements we have made and are trying to make!

The Little Things **Kelli Gladney (first year teacher)**

As the dust slowly begins to settle on our lives here, I am still finding little surprises every day. I think that it is important to take the time to enjoy the little things, especially since our year here has been colored by several major events which have shown us how terrible the world can be sometimes. It is easy for us to forget about the little delights in life.

The other day I boarded my usual trolleybus for what I thought would be my usual trip to the American Home. However, at one of the intersections the trolley turned the wrong way. Road construction was messing with my routine. (I guess some problems are present no matter where you are.) I wasn't sure whether to stay on and see where I ended up or to get off at a familiar place and walk. I decided to get off at one of the markets that I recognized. As I turned one of the corners, I was greeted by three VERY large, but beautiful goats walking down the sidewalk. For a brief moment I thought that the goats were taking a stroll by themselves, but not far behind them was an old woman herding them with a staff. It was an unexpected encounter in the streets of Vladimír. As I continued on, I realized that had the trolleybus not taken me down the wrong street, I would have never seen the goats.

Students at the American Home can also provide wonderful surprises. One of the levels that I teach is the D level (the most advanced students). The other day I decided to give them a very difficult poem: "anyone lived in a pretty how town" by e. e. cummings. This poem does not conform to any standards of poetry. It does not have any punctuation or capital letters, and it uses unusual syntax. I assumed that it would be very hard for them to understand, but I was interested to see how they would manage. I didn't even talk about the poem in class. I only read it out loud so they could hear how it sounded. I told them to take it home and write something (whatever they wanted) about the poem for homework. I expected most of the students to tell me they didn't really understand it. Instead, while reading the homework, I came across some very amazing analyses of the poem as well as other beautiful thoughts expressed in English. A lot of native speakers would not have written so eloquently about this poem. My students never cease to amaze me.

Of course, the little surprises are not always positive, but they all still add substance to the experience. It's a good thing that I have not been holding my breath while waiting for the hot water to be turned back on at my host's building. I would have passed out a long time ago

I have to say that the most breath-taking moment for me so far was while we were visiting Moscow. It felt like a dream to step into Red Square. This is a place I have heard so much about, a place with a lot of history. To stand there and feel the events of the past mixed with the present was awe-inspiring.

Every day I am reminded of the differences in life here—especially when I eat pickles for breakfast. However, every day I am also moving closer to finding myself at home here.

Comments from a Student

Note: Yelena Bychkovskikh is on the staff of the City Administration's International Department. As noted below, she worked closely with the "recreation" team this last summer and is now helping with both the recreation and tourism projects. In part as a thank you for all the help she provided and is providing, and to make it easier for her to work with native speakers in the future, we arranged for her to get a "scholarship" for both the regular advanced class and for the advanced conversation class at the AH.

Yelena's response:

"I want to thank you again for giving me the opportunity to attend classes at the AH. I really enjoy them. This is just what I needed. I have a chance to speak English more, enlarge my vocabulary and simply enjoy the atmosphere there. I'm sure lots of people have already told you that the American Home is a truly unique organization that has everything and even more to make the students feel at home AND to make it possible for them to learn to speak English. Now I know about this place from my own experience."

Those of you who read Russian may want to check out the comments about the American Home that appeared in a "chat room" September 15-17. The address is:

<http://www.forum.wec.ru/index.php?showtopic=35224&st=0>

Most of the comments are quite positive. But some of the participants clearly prefer the "Queen's English" to our "terrible American accents."

--Oxana Ustinova, the AH Office Manager, provided the chat room info.

A Letter Home

Britt Newman (first year teacher)

*Dear American Home friends, former teachers, potential applicants, and others:
Ron asked for volunteers to write "first impressions" articles for the fall newsletter. I offered to contribute something, but unfortunately, I've been swamped with work and I haven't had time to write. As a substitute, I've submitted a copy of my first letter home. It's not an article, but it may provide a glimpse of my first experiences in Russia. My apologies for not preparing something special for the newsletter.*

September 18, 2004
Dear Mom and Dad,

Just returned from my first anthropological excursion – to a Russian banya. The banya is a traditional, sauna-like house that aims to refresh by making you sweat out impurities and by increasing the blood flow around your body. I had done my homework before attempting field observation (I must have watched the Soviet comedy Enjoy Your Bath ten times). I have to say that I noticed a disturbing number of differences between our banya experience and that of Zhenya and the other characters. I can only assume that these were due to regional variation in banya customs.

A brief description of the banya: First you enter a dry room that vaguely resembles a cattle holding pen. Don't worry, the awkward hesitation (“are we supposed to undress now?”) is only temporary. Not that modesty imposes, but one doesn't want to seem too anxious to get naked with a bunch of other men. More importantly for the outside observer, you are likely the only one having such prudish thoughts. For people that live in sub-zero conditions much of the year, Russians are amazingly comfortable without clothes.

Once inside the steam room, you and your companions begin the process of “getting the blood flowing,” which is the end goal of the banya. This you do by squeezing onto a bench, heads just centimeters below the wooden ceiling, and breathing the near-scalding steam that fills the air around you. When your lungs have acclimated to breathing air that is 50% water, you proceed to the intriguing game of “conversation.”

Something of an aside en route to activating the blood, this game is initiated by the first banya-goer to feel the onset of light-headedness. Once said person realizes that the room is not supposed to be spinning, he attempts a comment (or, if brave, a joke) in order to hide his condition. The companions must then respond, without coughing on the water condensation that is quickly building in their lungs. The first contestant to move down to a lower, cooler bench loses.

When your faces reach the color of boiled hotdogs, you're ready for the birch branch phase. These branches culminate the process of activating the blood. To begin, you lie down on the now-familiar high bench. A banya companion shakes wet, leafy birch branches over your body. The leaves shed an earthy, forest scent and through the steam you almost see birds, flowers and –THWACK!!! The first blow catches you by surprise, but you steel yourself as the crazed person-you-thought-you-knew proceeds to pummel the length of your body. The branches soon shed their foliage and dwindle to thin, whip-like implements, much more appropriate for activating blood. Unfortunately, I was the first to be beaten today, so I emerged with rather puny flesh-wounds. My AH coworker, Matt, had the real Russian banya experience – boy did he get his blood flowing!

After the climax of the beating, it is best to let your body cool down slowly. This is accomplished by sprinting from the steam room and jumping naked into a snow bank. Because we are still in early September (our first snow is weeks away) we were forced to improvise with icy well water.

Thus ended the banya experience. More studies will be necessary, just not too soon. Would write more, but it's time for me to change my bandages.
Love, Britt

P.S. Please send peanut butter!

A SUMMER OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Ron

We had a very productive—and very busy—summer. Thanks to the Fulbright grant, on June 22 I arrived in Vladimir with a group of 14 social studies teachers from around the country. The states represented included Washington, California, Nevada, Wisconsin, New Jersey, and, of course, Illinois. We arrived later than planned because we didn't make our Delta connection in New York. We managed to get on the later Aeroflot flight—but despite repeated assurances that “everything would be taken care of,” our luggage didn't join us. We found this out after taking nearly two hours to clear Passport Control in Moscow.

Two days later Delta delivered our luggage to Vladimir—minus one bag that never did make it. (Another bag was lost by Delta on the way back home.)

Despite this inauspicious beginning, thanks to the group's wonderful good humor and eagerness to learn, and the hard work of a lot of people, first and foremost among them, Alexei, the rest of the trip went very well—as the following comments attest.

For a colorful—and I think interesting—“trip diary,” go to:

http://www.reec.uiuc.edu/outreach/fulbright/Photo_Diary.html.

This is a part of the web site for the University of Illinois Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center. (The last “E” was just recently added.) Lynda Park, the Center's Assistant Director, played the major role in getting the grant—and in helping prepare the teachers before departure. (I think the AH and the REEEC make a great team!)

While the Fulbright group was in Russia we hosted our first high school exchange student through North West Student Exchange, a not-for-profit educational organization headquartered in Seattle, Washington. We hope to continue with this program—despite Russia's current security problems. (Vladimir remains quiet and safe.)

The day after the Fulbright teachers left, two teams of specialists arrived to gather information for “tourism development” and “summer recreation” projects respectively. Working on tourism are Dr. Bruce Wicks, a tourism specialist from the University of Illinois, Karen Hasara, former mayor of Springfield, Illinois (among other things), and Katya Lakshtanova, a young lady originally from Moscow who is finishing her MA in tourism management at the U of I. Mrs. Hasara, who has substantial practical experience and very good contacts in the State of Illinois, has already come up with an additional \$5,000 in “seed money” to follow up the \$5,000 Sister Cities International grant that got them to Vladimir. Bruce Wicks is getting his students involved, and Katya Lakshtanova is taking responsibility for the English language web site that was roughed out last spring by a group of ISU students working under Dr. Joaquin Vila. With luck—and a lot of hard work—this will be a very productive project. (See the comments below. The new Vladimir web site address is: www.vladimir-russia.net. Please keep in mind that this web site will be “under construction” for some time to come. Feedback and suggestions will be welcome.)

The two recreation specialists are Dr. Barbara Schlatter, from Illinois State University, and Dr. Marta Moorman, from the University of Nebraska. Barb and Marta worked on a similar project in Guatemala when they were in the Peace Corps. They feel that they have gotten off to a good start on their project. (See their comments below.)

We can also take pride in our success in getting both Juliana Rogachova and Masha Yumatova to the States this summer. Juliana is now back in Russia—but we are “plotting” to get her back for extended training as soon as possible. Masha will be here for two years while she earns her Masters in Criminal Justice at ISU. (Again, see below.)

One of the first things I wanted to do when I got to the AH was check out all the remodeling work. I was very pleased with what I saw. Both Galya and Alexei can be proud of what they have managed to accomplish. Alexei can be especially pleased with how the spiral staircase in the old storage room, which he designed, turned out. The new stairs take a little getting used to, but they provide very convenient access to the teachers' new office.

As noted in the last newsletter (and above), the old teachers' office has been turned into a “real library.” Lena Belova, who, as noted above, is back at work after her maternity leave, is setting up shop there—and getting everything organized. All the library and teaching materials are being put on the computer. Oxana and Olya are of course helping wherever they can. In fact, all the AH staff has been doing first-rate work. (Several of the Fulbright teachers commented to me on the helpfulness and efficiency of the staff—whom they saw regularly while they were in Vladimir—most of their lectures were presented in the basement meeting room.)

FULBRIGHT TRIP

The Teachers' Reaction

Jessica Barranco

In the April American Home newsletter, Alexei wrote enthusiastically about the anticipated arrival of fourteen “hungry” American social studies teachers eager to study in Russia. Partnered with a program led by the University of Illinois’s Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center, fourteen extremely fortunate American educators arrived in Vladimir on June 22. We were promised an in-depth look at “Everyday Life in Russia,” and the program arranged for us by the American Home delivered just that and much, much more. The richness of our personal and professional experiences exceeded our expectations in every way. As participant Pat Arends wrote, “My trip to Russia this past summer was a journey that defies words, and the time I spent in Vladimir and Murom holds the most cherished memories for me.” Participant Mark Johnson recalled: “Before going on our trip, I had wished we had more time in Moscow and St. Petersburg, but after completing the trip, I wished we had had more time in Vladimir. The people we met through the American Home showed the true depth of Russian openness and hospitality.”

We began our Russian adventure with an outstanding pre-departure workshop in Illinois. Sitting around a conference table at the REEEEC, we put names to faces, and after countless Russian movies and trips to Target for last-minute, must-have items, we were anxious and ready to be on our way. Our flights turned out to be mini adventures of their own, featuring a missed connection and misplaced luggage, but neither inconvenience managed to quell our excitement. Ron had sung the praises of Alexei and Galya while we were in Illinois, and the dazzling pair met us at the airport in Moscow. Needless to say, they captured our hearts in an instant. Within minutes, we were following Alexei anywhere, with or without his notorious bell, and Galya miraculously anticipated our every need.

Despite the substantial delay in our arrival time, our gracious host families greeted us warmly with bread and salt at the American Home, and our adventure began in earnest.

How generously our host families treated us throughout our stay! “We weren’t observers, we were welcomed into their culture,” wrote Patrice Bain. We dined on delicious home cooked meals, we traveled to family dachas where we feasted on shashlik and invigorated ourselves in traditional banyas (the Russian version of a sauna—see Britt Newman’s letter to his parents). We rode trolley cars where in the words of Chris Bryant, some of the “ticket-takers looked like they could be in Vogue.” We strolled the streets of the city for hours until it got dark. We drank tea and vodka. We picked fresh berries and vegetables from our host families’ gardens. We lived without hot water. We sang “Moroz, Moroz” at all hours of the day and night. And we loved it!! “I went to Russia to learn more about history, which of course, I did; but even more than that, I became enchanted with the Russian people,” wrote Patrice.

Our rich family home-stays were complimented by the full and varied educational and cultural program arranged by the American Home staff and their counterparts at the Murom Institute. We thank Nelli, Nina, Tatiana, and their assistants not only for their engaging lessons on Russian language and culture, but also for their patience and good humor. We heard from experts on religion, contemporary public opinion, the legal/judicial system, gender issues, education, Putin’s foreign policy, and regional economies. We were fascinated and moved by the vast knowledge and experience of Professor Percy Gurwitch who spent several mornings with us. Our afternoon excursions gave us the unique opportunity to speak directly with government officials, teachers, community activists, religious leaders, attorneys, and police officers. The candor, initiative, and dedication of Elena Rogacheva, Olga Goncharova, Valentina Spiridonova (in Vladimir), Natalia Zhilenko and her colleagues (in Murom), Boris Gavrilov (in Moscow), and all the presenters in St. Petersburg, truly inspired us. In them we saw individuals wholly committed to building a Russian society based on democratic principles. We can honestly say that we experienced the changing face of Russia first hand.

No doubt many of our classrooms at home are now adorned with Russian maps, matryoshkas, and posters of the Cyrillic alphabet and Russian soccer teams. Some of our students are reading Russian fairy tales and Pushkin’s *The Bronze Horseman* for the first time this year. Some of our students are now corresponding with their Russian counterparts on a regular basis. We made real connections, and we established genuine friendships with the people we met. “Without the American Home’s resources, hardworking staff, and the openness of the people of Vladimir,

our trip would have been far less fulfilling,” writes Mark Johnson. Many of us continue to correspond with our Russian friends, and I sincerely hope our correspondence will continue. We thank Ron Pope for his bold vision, and we thank the University of Illinois and the Fulbright-Hays Group Programs Abroad grant for making this remarkable experience possible for us. Thanks to all of them, social studies and history students in fourteen different classrooms from California to New Jersey are reaping the benefits of their teachers’ new insights and personal experiences. They may even find themselves singing “Moroz, Moroz.” If so, we hope, somehow, our dear friends at the American Home, elsewhere in Vladimir, and in Murom, Moscow, and St. Pete can hear them.

Murom

Note: I received the following e-mail from Natalia Zhilenko, the head of the English Program at the Murom Institute, and one of the main organizers of the Murom segment of the program for the Fulbright teachers.

Dear Ron!

Thank you for your e-mail and for everything you are doing for us. The visit of the American teachers to Murom was an important event. There were several articles in the local newspapers and a TV program devoted to the visit. We have discussed it in every student group and have showed the photos of our seminar. The host families and their American guests are exchanging e-mails.

Jessica Barranco has sent two packages of books on social work to my address. They arrived safely and I sent an e-mail to her expressing our gratitude. Since there has been no reply, I am not sure whether she received it or not. The books are very good and we are starting to use them in our work. Patrice Bain is corresponding with her host family. She has promised to send us some materials for law students. Her host family and I are going to send her some presents as a compensation for her loss. [It was Partice’s bag that didn’t make it back to the States.] It is very nice of Pat Arens to prepare some materials for us. I think she should send them at my address. It is Natalia Zhilenko, Polevaya ul. 10, Murom, 602256 Vladimirskaia Oblast, RUSSIA

Thank you for the movies. We have shown the video about Illinois State University to several student groups. And we are working now with the film "Forrest Gump" in two groups, and the students like it very much. "Dave" is waiting for its turn to be used.

Best regards to you from my colleagues and students. We look forward to hearing from you.

Natalia Zhilenko

P.S. You may use the following e-mail addresses:

inyaz@yandex.ru

zaman@mit.ru

Unfortunately there are some technical problems with our Internet provider and sometimes we don't get our mail. Therefore, it is probably best to send each note to more than one address—just in case.

Note: The American Home gave Natalia VHS copies of “Forrest Gump” and “Dave,” along with transcriptions of the dialogues, vocabulary lists, and study questions prepared by the AH teachers over the years. We will provide more teaching materials in the future. Also, Jessica Barranco had not received Natalia’s thank you e-mail. She was glad to hear that both of her packages had arrived. If you send something to Natalia and don’t hear back from her, let us know. The AH staff can make a phone call to find out if your message—or package—was received.

TOURISM AND SUMMER REC PROJECTS

Developing Tourism

Karen Hasara—with Bruce Wicks and Katya Lakshtanova

Three central Illinoisans with no previous ties to the American Home and little knowledge of the true status of tourism in Vladimir, spent a week in Russia at the same time the team examining recreation programs was there.

We each brought a particular strength to the project: Katya was invaluable with her obvious knowledge of the language (she is originally from Moscow), and also with her understanding of the culture; Bruce had the book knowledge and tremendous credentials not only as a professor, but also as a consultant on many projects both in the U.S. and internationally; Karen had been responsible for a convention and visitor's bureau in Springfield, Illinois and had first hand experience in all facets of its responsibilities and how citizens reacted to various projects.

We were there because government leaders in Vladimir saw a need for assistance in building tourism for present and future economic growth and in competing in the tourism market that is beginning to blossom in Russia. That foresight was a motivator for us in our work.

We spent five very busy days examining every facet of the potential for success in developing tourism in Vladimir. We were, of course, tourists ourselves, which enhanced our efforts even more. We visited the wonderful museums in the area, and other tourist attractions such as churches, recreation areas, and historical sites. We interviewed many people, including hotel and restaurant owners and managers, city and oblast officials, tour company owners, and guides and site managers. Pertinent data were examined and discussions were held at the local Tourism Academy. We also visited nearby towns, looking for opportunities to work together for the benefit of Vladimir and the surrounding area.

After gathering all the information we could, we made an oral presentation to city and oblast officials while we were still in Vladimir, outlining the area's strengths and weaknesses, and making a few preliminary recommendations. Upon our return, we completed a detailed report with a number of suggestions and comments, and we look forward to continuing to assist in their implementation as we are able and needed. Our chief recommendations are the creation of a tourism bureau for the region whose goals would be similar to those of our own bureaus, and the design and implementation of a new English language web site for Vladimir. We continue to assist in locating funding for these projects, and Katya (with help from Ron and others) is working hard on the web site. (Go to: www.vladimir-russia.net. Feedback will be very much appreciated. Write to Katya at: lakshtnv@uiuc.edu. Please keep in mind that the site is in the early stages of construction.)

A Side Note on the American Home: We were new to the concept of the American Home. Its reputation and accomplishments were amazing to us. We know that if our recommendations become reality, it will be due not only to the desire of the city officials to make changes, but to the hard work of the American Home staff and the AH's fine reputation and what it means to the people of Vladimir. That relationship has to be one of the most successful that any American organization has developed in Russia, and we marvel at the commitment of the people who have worked so hard and remain committed to its success.

We thank the wonderful citizens of Vladimir for their hospitality, and Ron Pope for allowing us to participate in this exciting venture. We believe it is safe to say that we feel that the time and effort we have invested in this project have been rewarded and will be even more so as we watch—and continue to assist with making—the recommendations become reality.

Thoughts on a Vladimir Adventure

Marta Moorman, University of Nebraska and Barb Schlatter, Illinois State University

When the opportunity came to work on a summer recreation program for the City of Vladimir, Russia, we jumped at the chance. We didn't know much about Russia – the people, the culture, the history, the weather, the geography – not much about anything Russian. But here was an opportunity to visit that incredible nation. We had to do it!

The summer recreation program came about because the Vladimir City Administration had recognized a typical community problem. The young people in Vladimir have little to do in the summer besides drink beer, smoke and get into trouble – facts that are widely recognized. Many cities in the United States have had similar problems and have turned to organized recreation programs for solutions. Recreation activities are not only fun, purposeful and engaging for youth, but are also much less expensive for communities than hiring more law enforcement officers to deal with the problem, making recreation a sound investment for communities of all sizes.

We came to Vladimir in late July to visit the city, tour its facilities and parks, meet with the city administrators to see what their goals were, and meet with groups of youth to see where their needs and interests lay. We found the

city administrators concerned about the problems and open to suggestions. We found the youth excited about new prospects and welcoming of new ideas. We were able to meet with the Skateboard Club – the members are seeking a safe place to skate, with ramps and rails and other obstacles. The Biking/Outdoor Club brought many members to meet us. This club is very community oriented, and works on many environmental projects in the area, in addition to participating in lots of biking and other outdoor recreation activities. One afternoon they showed up with their bicycles, including bikes for us, and escorted us clear across town to a large park with numerous biking trails! It was one of the highlights of the trip – a chance to see the parts of the city that most visitors would never see, a chance to see how the real people lived.

The parks and open spaces in the city have excellent potential for recreation. For the most part, the administrators of those facilities love their jobs and provide as many programs and services as possible on limited budgets. Most of the parks had maintenance issues – run down buildings, hard packed bare dirt surrounding the popular attractions and walking trails that were not paved. With the exception of sports areas and the popular attractions, most parks were left very much in their natural state – with unmowed grass and untrimmed bushes and trees. It was unclear whether this was by choice, or because the budgets did not stretch enough to cover those areas of maintenance.

At every facility we visited, we were warned about vandalism. Virtually all outdoor areas are subject to vandalism it seems, as this was one of the first issues the park directors brought up when we discussed the possibility of adding to their facilities.

Our goal on this trip was not only to assess the facilities and programs already available to Vladimir youth, but to also demonstrate some recreational activities that are popular in the U.S., which Russian youth might not have been exposed to previously. Through a grant from the University of Nebraska at Kearney, we were able to bring to Vladimir a pair of disc golf baskets along with 20 discs, a couple of skateboards and 2 pairs of in-line skates, some new basketballs and over 100 rock climbing holds and other hardware to build a rock climbing wall. The disc golf baskets and discs, along with the basketballs went almost immediately to a youth summer camp, and will be housed on a more permanent basis at one of the parks. The skateboards and in-line skates were donated to the Skateboard Club. The climbing wall equipment was entrusted to the Biking/Outdoor Club, since they were intensely interested in the prospect of having one available in the city that young people could afford to use. (The fee for the one wall that has been set up is apparently beyond the means of most youth.)

Our next phase of the project is to try to find funding to assist the parks and facilities that already exist, and create some new recreational areas, like a skatepark and a disc golf course. An indoor location for the climbing wall is being sought. We are also researching construction diagrams of different skatepark elements—ramps and rails—so that those can potentially be built in Vladimir.

One of Vladimir’s greatest assets is its people. Everywhere we went, we met people who really care about the city, who are involved in civic organizations or operations, who enjoy their jobs and look for every opportunity to improve the situation. The staff at the American Home was tremendously helpful, the city administrators were supportive and our interpreter, Yelena Bychkovskikh, made the whole trip worthwhile. Thank you everyone for helping make our first glimpse of Russia very special!

ASSISTANCE FOR TWO SPECIAL PEOPLE

Juliana Rogachova—A Girl Who Can Sing

Thanks to a \$1,500 scholarship from the Stanford Jazz Workshop, additional financial help from several very generous donors, and “logistical assistance” from people in both New York and California, Juliana made it to the States on July 21. She stayed in New York with Katchie Cartwright and her family. Katchie is, among other things, chair of Sisters in Jazz. In addition to taking her sightseeing, she worked with Juliana on her music before she went to California and then again before her return to Russia. She also helped her “stock up” on CDs, music scores, and other materials—and she is continuing to give her a lot of advice.

On July 24 Juliana flew to California for two weeks at the Stanford Jazz Workshop—where the “classes started at 9 a.m. and ended at midnight.” In addition to group classes on jazz theory and improvisation, she worked one-on-one with Dena deRose, whom she thought was an “absolutely wonderful teacher.”

According to Dena deRose, who teaches in the jazz program at Purchase College in New York, “Juliana’s love for singing was inspiring to all the students and staff at the Stanford Jazz Workshop. Many of them, including myself, were amazed at how much she felt for the music—for not having much exposure to jazz. I would love to work with her further. It’s a joy for a teacher to have a student as eager and willing to learn as Juliana.”

Juliana wrote that she very much enjoyed working with everyone, including her fellow students at the Workshop who impressed her greatly. She said that she told her Mom in a phone conversation just before her flight home that she really wanted to stay—and keep studying. (We hope to help her return!)

At the end of her first week at the Workshop, Juliana participated in the traditional Friday student concert. A Workshop volunteer suggested to Jan De Carli, a Board member of the San Jose Jazz Society, that she take the opportunity to hear the “Russian girl” perform. According to Mrs. De Carli, she and her friends were “astonished at the quality of Juliana’s voice.”

Mrs. De Carli arranged for Juliana—and two other girls from the Workshop—to perform the next Friday evening, August 6, at the “jam session” that preceded the first full day of the San Jose Jazz Festival. With approximately 180,000 in attendance each year, the Festival is the largest gathering of jazz lovers in the world.

The jam session was held at Pete Escovedo’s newly opened Jazz Club—with about 200 people in attendance. Juliana sang “Cry Me a River.” She was backed by a combo of professional musicians for the first time in her life. When she finished, she was given a standing ovation—and the musicians asked her to sing another number—something that rarely happens. She sang “All of Me” and was given another standing ovation.

According to Mrs. De Carli, the next day the musicians, who are very difficult to impress, wanted to “know all about” Juliana. The organizer of the jam session, trumpet player Modesto Bresegno, said that he expects Juliana to be a headliner at a future Festival.

Note: Terry Haugen, one of the social studies teachers in the Fulbright group who happens to live near Stanford and who heard Juliana perform at the American Home on the 4th of July, got Juliana from and to the airport in San Francisco, looked after her over the weekend she was there, and drove her to San Jose—making her performance at the Festival possible.

According to Terry, while she was in California, Juliana “got to see the ocean for the first time, albeit through the fog, and was enamored with the sea lions south of Half Moon Bay. She also enjoyed seeing the Golden Gate Bridge. She got to taste her first Chinese food and conquered chopsticks her first try. She was amazed at all of the different people from so many cultures living together.”

In summing it all up from the American side, Katchie Cartwright wrote:

“Juliana Rogachova is definitely a young jazz singer to watch. Not only does she have an uncommonly beautiful and flexible voice, she is extraordinarily musical and disciplined, and she has a great ear. While Juliana’s exposure to American jazz has naturally been limited, she has managed to glean more from limited resources than have many American singers her age with a wealth of information in their backyard. Juliana deserves congratulations for her achievements and support for her continuing education. I expect nothing less than the very best from her in the years to come.”

According to Alexei, Juliana returned home so overwhelmed with her experience that she really couldn’t put it all into words—even in Russian. She did say that even though the schedule at the Workshop was “absolutely exhausting,” the experience was overwhelmingly rewarding. She is even more motivated than before to try to do her very best. And all of her instructors in Moscow have indicated that the experience was definitely worthwhile.

In short, the trip was clearly a major success.

As noted above, our goal now is to find a way to get Juliana back to the States for extended training. Anyone interested in helping make this possible should let us know.

Masha Yumatova—A Dream Coming True

We started working to get Masha enrolled in the ISU Criminal Justice Masters program about two years ago. At that time, I know that Masha saw this as only a dream. Now, thanks to a number of people, including several generous financial supporters, and a lot of hard work on her part, she has begun her two-year program. She plans to graduate in the spring of 2006 and then attend the U of I Police Training Institute's 12 week program. At ISU she will study criminological theory, research, statistics, policing, and American law. At PTI she'll get practical training.

In addition, she will have the opportunity to visit various local law enforcement organizations and prisons. She has already visited the Mohamet, Illinois Police Department, thanks to one of the teachers from the Fulbright group, Tom Murdoch, and she's had an "introductory" meeting at the police department in Normal. She's been invited back "any time" for patrol "ride alongs," to spend time with detectives, see how crime scenes are processed, and to observe other policing functions. (Masha spent last year working as an investigator in the small community of Bogolubovo and the surrounding villages just east of Vladimir.) She's also met with Federal District Court Judge Michael Mihm in Peoria. He's invited her back to observe his court in session.

After Masha arrived in the States on August 1, she stayed with Dr. Donna Vandiver—until the residence halls opened. Dr. Vandiver writes:

"During her two-week stay with me and my husband, she spent some time just becoming familiar with her new surroundings and getting a head start for the semester. This included a few mundane tasks: opening a bank account, buying schoolbooks, and meeting her professors. Also, Masha wanted to purchase a digital camera to document her journey. We spent an afternoon looking for the most suitable camera. It was fun for her to talk to many salespersons and practice her English. We also visited the malls, played miniature golf, and spent an afternoon at a local lake. In addition, Masha took a weekend trip to Chicago and another to St. Louis to visit some of her American friends. After school began, she started working as a graduate assistant and studying for classes. Her professors are impressed with her excellent English and her tenacious determination to learn as much as possible. She has already begun working on a research project, which she will have the opportunity to present at a research conference in the near future."

Masha's comments: "When I was in Russia I couldn't believe that some day I would get a chance to study at an American university. For most Russians it's almost impossible to get such an opportunity. After three months in the States, I still cannot believe that I am here. It's like a dream come true for me. Everyday I learn something new, I meet different people, and I find out interesting things about American culture. For example, it is very interesting for me to compare the Russian and American educational systems. I have found that the requirements in the courses I'm taking here at ISU are different from what teachers require in Russia. These include making PowerPoint presentations in class, more reading and writing assignments, and more student participation during class. Also on the exams American students are expected to apply what they have learned, and not just "repeat" what has been taught. I am confident that while I'm in America I will gain theoretical and practical experience which will be very useful for me in the future."

ALUMNI NOTES

Bryan Scoville-Pope (Rinchen Gyatso), summer 1996

Here I am, half way around the world once again, teaching English! I currently live in Japan, not too far from the ancient city of Nara. I work for an English conversation school in the city of Tsu. I was only at the AH for the summer of '96, but the experience had a major impact on my life. In trying to explain my language and culture to my Russian students, I learned a great deal myself. That experience has been invaluable to my work in Japan.

I hope everyone is doing well. Who knows where you'll hear from me next!

Note: For those of you who don't know, Bryan (Gyatso) is Ron and Susie's son. He is also an ordained Buddhist monk. This is his fourth trip to Japan. Previously he was there as a junior high, high school, and college student.

Jeremy Wolfe, spring 2002

wolfejg@hotmail.com

I'm currently in my 5th and final year at the University of South Carolina. My senior year has been busy as I'm completing two undergraduate degrees, one in Russian studies, the second in mathematics. I'm planning to do my graduate study in national security and Central Asian studies, but I'm still looking at schools, so please send me any ideas! Much like before coming to the American Home, I've decided that a little more experience could help me out. Besides, after 5 years, I'm ready to get out of the classroom for a while. I'm currently looking at jobs in the federal government, military, and other areas. Hopefully I'll have a chance to develop my Russian further and even pursue a new language.

After finishing my term at the American Home, I headed to St. Petersburg and studied intensive Russian for a semester. Since then I've had the chance to study in Israel, Czech Republic, and Kyrgyzstan. I've returned to Russia quite a few times and met with friends from Vladimir. They've also spread out to different areas. A few are working in Moscow, one in the United States. Thanks to e-mail we are all able to stay in touch and reminisce about the good ol' days at the American Home. I'm sure that many will recall our first Mardi Gras party, including the pole dances for King and Queen and the mound of uneaten *ponchiki*. I'm hoping to make it back to the American Home before I have to start a new job. I have to admit that Vladimir and my experience there has become pretty important to me. People are always impressed that I've spent time teaching English in Russia. But, they probably don't know about our great students, the friendships between teachers, or the special after-hours English lessons shared over a *pivo*. Considering these perks, teaching English at the American Home didn't often seem like work.

Note: Jeremy replaced Anna Babel who was added as a seventh teacher on an experimental basis for the fall 2001 term. (She was scheduled to go into the Peace Corps in January.) Anna made it possible to cut the standard class load from five to four per teacher. This worked out so well that we went searching for a replacement for the spring term. Jeremy was available. (We don't normally hire anyone who hasn't completed his/her undergraduate degree.)

We'd very much like to hear from more AH alumni before the spring issue!