

## **A Home Away from Home – The American Home, AH newsletter, October 2005**

Norm Manzer

You never know who you will meet in an airport, but sometimes it is like finding a gold mine.

Flashback to two or three years ago, and I find myself in Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport awaiting a return flight to the U.S. We had just finished our third year of hosting a summer camp in the Vladimir Region for 100 teens from orphanages in that area. After "being up" for two weeks to entertain the kids, our team of 18 was ready to get some sleep. One of our adult team members said, "Norm, come over here. This man heads up the American Home in Vladimir." Ron and I met face-to-face for the first and only time.

I had been going to Russia since 1992 and had become very involved in working with orphans through my Rotary club and then through our Grace Episcopal Church here in St Helena, California. It was about my 18<sup>th</sup> trip to Russia over that time period, but I had not heard of Ron's American Home. Such a well kept secret.

Ron and I exchanged some emails, and just by chance I let him know about our intent to set up a transitional home in Vladimir for orphanage "graduates". We had worked with these kids at the summer camps over the years and had come to realize the dismal prospects that were ahead of them once they were forced to leave the orphanage at age 16, or "graduate," as it is called.

Ron immediately told me about what the American Home had gone through to get established and counseled us on how to dodge the problems that could lie ahead. He even gave us a referral to the AH's legal counsel who most generously donated her services to our efforts to purchase a home.

Things did not go well in this effort to buy an apartment. In spite of the guidance we received from the AH staff and our 12 years of experience in Russia, we were not prepared for all of the details and "cultural pitfalls." Nonetheless, as I tried to maneuver through the maze of bureaucracy, I was able to retreat to the AH for solace. I likened it to a nation's embassy in a foreign land. It was a retreat from everything around me. It was like I had found my home away from home. The combination of the assistance by the AH staff and the ambiance of the American environment made it possible for me to maintain my sanity.

It turned out that we walked away from the impending purchase, and I left Russia feeling defeated. Perhaps I would never return again.

Soon thereafter, our church contacted Children's Hope Chest out of Colorado, and found out that they were trying to do the same thing that we were trying to do – except they already had an office and personnel on-site in Vladimir and could match our funds to allow for the purchase of two homes instead of just one. Here we are one year later and both homes (one in Pokrov and one in Vladimir) are up and running. One is for boys and the other for girls.

Without the moral support and advice of the AH staff, especially Valentina Spiridonova's legal counsel and Ron's practical advice, we could have easily made a mistake and gotten in over our heads.

Thank you Ron Pope and the American Home staff for what you have done to help make our dream become a reality. Bless you all.