

# EDUCATION EXCHANGES TRANSFORM LIVES

**THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
VLADIMIR/CANTERBURY SISTER CITY ASSOCIATION  
OF BLOOMINGTON/NORMAL, ILLINOIS—1989-2014**

**JOE GRABILL, EDITOR  
ORLYN EDGE & MARGARET ANN HAYDEN, ASSISTANT EDITORS**



## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This new sign in our sister city garden on Constitution Trail celebrates the 25th anniversary of the Vladimir/Canterbury Sister City Association and marks the planting of our new Canterbury Garden, 65 yards east of the Vladimir Garden sign. Canterbury Garden includes three trees in honor of the Three Cities Association of Canterbury, a beech (photo above, right), chestnut, and oak. This book is a successor to *Sister Cities in Our Hands* (2009), a telling of 56 Canterbury, Vladimir, and B/N stories, at our 20th anniversary.

Below is the Sister City Memorial in McGraw Park in Bloomington which honors all B/N sister city programs, including Vladimir/Canterbury. The handshake image in the center is on the seat bench in the left center of the image on the right. The dedication of the Memorial occurred in August 2013.

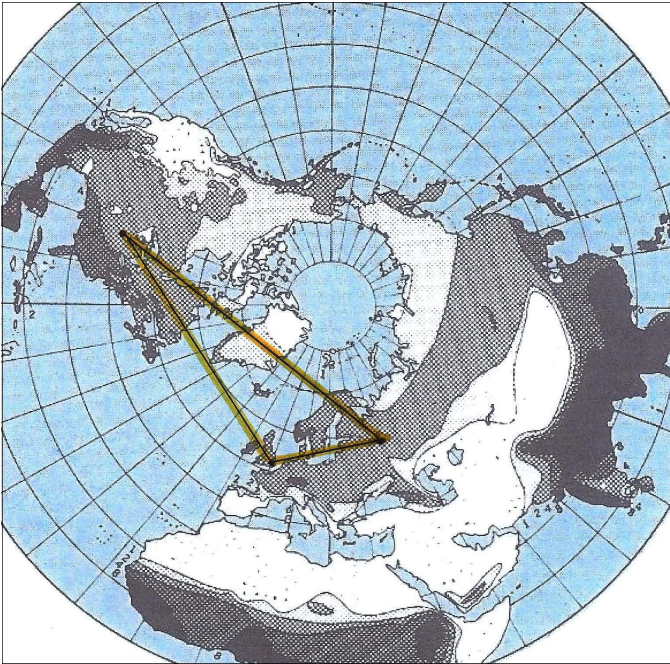
This book includes over 50 stories and/or photos of participants in Vladimir education exchanges. We have had many citizen and some education exchanges with Canterbury. This collection expands more than seven-fold from the 7 Vladimir education stories in *Sister Cities in Our Hands*. See page 15 for a chronological list of Vladimir student exchanges and sponsors from 1990 to 2012 and the Index on the inside of the back cover for an alphabetical list of names of youth, family hosts, and others mentioned in this book.

These stories show that education exchanges—

- 1) transform lives,
- 2) build lasting Russian-American friendships,
- and 3) deepen intercultural awareness.



# EDUCATION INTRODUCTION



The whole sister city triangle has educated and immersed citizens in Vladimir, Canterbury, and Bloomington/Normal within intercultural diversity. Once email became common, we sensed the dynamics of living in a global village—a global commons.

The first Vladimir student education exchange was not thought of as an education but a sports exchange. It involved Illinois State University track students, led by Joyce and Bob Kief, going to Vladimir in 1989. In 1990 university professors and students began a large array of exchange programs, which continue today with ISU professors and students of the College of Nursing and the School of Kinesiology and Recreation.

At the center of formal education exchanges has been the high school program, which extended from 1995 to 2012. The coordinators of these high school exchanges are, from the beginning in Vladimir:

Elena (Lyena) Rogacheva (upper left on the cover), and in

Bloomington/Normal (left to right on the cover):

Chuck Steen	1998-2000	Elaine Cousins	2009-2012
Orlyn Edge	2000-2005	Desiree Quizon-Colquitt	2012-2014
Diane Boeck	2005-2009		

Elena Rogacheva and Orlyn Edge tell the first two stories in this book. Stories of Diane Boeck and Desiree Quizon-Colquitt are about their roles as sponsors. Elaine Cousins is president of our Association. Such teachers at B/N high schools as Kelly Keogh (his story is next) contributed a great deal to the high school exchanges. Then we give a flavor of early participants in university and high school exchanges.

The core of this book is the stories and/or photos of B/N and Vladimir exchange students and sponsors, arranged in chronological order from 1998 to 2012. For a variety of reasons, including difficulty in locating people, we regret that some stories have not been included. Our Association intends to resume high school exchanges and is exploring different options. If you want more information or want to be involved contact Orlyn Edge, 309/825-4889; [edge@ilstu.edu](mailto:edge@ilstu.edu)

Margaret Ann Hayden helped us get started, collected stories, and proofed. Orlyn Edge sleuthed diligently to locate people and to get their stories. He also met with Ann White, our V/C historian. Ann's effort provided many photos. I gathered stories and put the book together.

We have been a team.

Joe Grabill  
Normal, Illinois, October 2014

*Vladimir High School Exchange Coordinator*

## **BRIDGING DIFFERENCES**

**Elena (Lyena) Rogacheva**



In 1998 I was in Bloomington-Normal as a member of a university delegation and was invited to lunch by Chuck Steen, a leader of the Education Committee. We discussed our school exchange program. I think that peace and collaboration between countries can be achieved not only by official negotiations between the governmental leaders but also through face to face people contacts and dialogue. People diplomacy is an important element in initiating a dialogue of cooperation.

So we committed to make the youth exchange program more systemic. Children at the age of 15-16 were sent regularly to Bloomington-Normal for 10 months. I pay tribute to Elisabeth Weir who became the sponsor for such delegates from Vladimir as Dima Zinoviev and Sveta Zhydovtchitz. Kids had a chance to come to the US and to take part in a peace building process by acquiring cross-cultural literacy and by crushing existing stereotypes of the cold war about two great countries, Russia and the USA. We can be proud that many Russian school students have taken part in our exchange program. American school students also have come to Vladimir for two weeks in the summer and gotten a chance to see our schools and cultural monuments. All of them have visited our ancient towns of Suzdal, Moscow, Vyazniki, Gus-Chrustalny and Bogolubovo. For some the host families provided the opportunity to see St. Petersburg.

This program has given a chance for the school youth not only to learn by doing what the American system of education is but also to stay in an American family and to learn much about family traditions and culture. All the members of the sister city association as well as host families tried to do their best to let the youth see as much as possible in both countries and to feel at home.

I want to express my gratitude to all of them. Joe Grabill together with our students planted trees and flowers in the Vladimir Garden. Judie Bey arranged at her house a lot of farewell parties for our school children. Jana and Orlyn Edge were very helpful all the time and came to the rescue at every moment. Diane Boeck also contributed much to the program by introducing our kids to new people and providing them with new experiences.

With a committee in Vladimir, I have recruited the Vladimir high school exchange students. In 2003 at the Elk Grove Village Sister Cities International convention near Chicago, Orlyn Edge and I presented the results of our program. We carried the flags of our countries. The feeling of pride overwhelmed us as we realized what an important mission we have. I must say all our school students have become more motivated in the peace building process and have learned a lot about the world of the other and about themselves. Many of them have become students of such prestigious universities in Moscow and Vladimir as Moscow State University and Vladimir State University of the Humanities. Some have graduated from foreign language departments and already work at international schools in other countries (for instance in Berlin), or take courses at foreign universities in Germany and the US.

In 2005 the representatives of Vladimir and Bloomington-Normal had a chance to meet in Canterbury with their colleagues from the Association of sister-cities and had fruitful discussions on the further development of our relations. It gave an impulse to stimulate school-exchange programs. In 2009 we had a great opportunity to meet in Bloomington-Normal and sum up the fruitful results of our cooperation.

The student exchange program has enriched me both as a coordinator in Vladimir and as parent. I was most delighted that my daughter Anya spent a year going to high school in Bloomington/Normal. Her host parents, Marilyn Snook and Chuck Stuckey, and their children gave an intimate and special dimension to the learning experience. I am most grateful for their gifts.

*Former High School Exchange Coordinator*

## **RUSSIAN STUDY IN AMERICA—FACILE OR DAUNTING?**

**Orlyn Edge**



Since 1995 the Vladimir/Canterbury Sister City Association has conducted a High School Exchange program that has brought over twenty Russian students to study for a full school year in Bloomington-Normal.

How could Russian parents send their beloved teenagers to America for ten months with no personal visits allowed? Besides the emotional trauma of seeing their children fly away for so long, the cost for parents was prohibitive in the early years. It wasn't until the Russian economy improved that parents could more easily manage to send their children to America. After all, there were expenses for the airline ticket and monthly spending money and, in later years, the substantial cost for the J-1 visa. Parents could communicate readily by e-mail but frequent communication by telephone was costly until recently when Skype made free Internet calls a breeze. Even though many teachers in Russian schools preferred British English to American English, Russian parents were willing to support their children for study in America because of the prospects for improved career opportunities in translation and international business that fluency in American English would enhance.

Why did Russian students want to study in America and how could they come for so long? They wanted to learn about American culture and youth, choose their own schedule of classes, and become proficient in the use of American English. However, the students probably didn't anticipate the most important benefit of all: a loving, generous and supportive American host family. These families bought winter coats, exposed their students to Chicago and cities afar, helped their students with homework, and spent several thousand dollars of their money in the process. As months passed, the bond that developed between student and host family was deep and loving—the result was a new set of parents in America.

A high percentage of the Russian exchange students received almost all A's studying in America. This was due to the fact that Elena Rogacheva and her committee selected top quality academic applicants from schools offering a strong curriculum with courses required. In addition, students were used to working hard because in Russian schools, homework means "work you do at home" for several hours each evening.

Thinking back to my days in school in rural Wisconsin, my parents, and most other American parents I think, wanted a better life for their children and hence would sacrifice an "arm or leg" in order to keep their children in school. With that said, it is easier to understand the decisions Russian parents made to send their children to study abroad.

Before responding to the initial question posed above, consider the quotes from a foreign exchange student who planned to study in the U.S.: "I want to be patient and brave." He spoke of the traits necessary to function and grow in a foreign environment. It requires patience to have "big boy thoughts, and little boy words." It requires patience to have continually to explain yourself, your words, your actions, and your motivations. It requires patience to be in a world where half the words and many of the inside jokes fly over your head. And it requires patience to build relationships with a new family, new classmates, and new friends. You remember how very patient and brave these students had to be.



Teacher at Normal Community High School  
**VLADIMIR STUDENT WITH FLAILING ARMS**  
Kelly Keogh

I have taught a number of Russian students from the Sister Cities Program during my twenty years of teaching International Relations at Normal Community High School. Whether it was Sasha Spiridonov writing an award winning editorial for the Peoria Courier Journal on US-Cuba relations, or Sasha Gorbach captivating the 200 Illinois high school students in attendance at the Illinois Capitol Forum on American Foreign Policy, or the daily humorous exchanges by Natalie Sablina in the classroom, the Russian students always left a lasting impression.

I found the Vladimir students an invaluable resource when it came to the study of the Cold War, the changing of political ideology or an analysis of cultural differences. The Russian students were unique in their interests, their academic acumen, their personalities and their adaptation to the high school setting in central Illinois.

Sasha Spiridonov left an indelible image on me as he stood in front of a crowd of three hundred people at the Peoria World Affairs Conference and delivered a 15 minute speech on the need for America to normalize relations with Cuba. His speech, complete without note cards, followed an award winning essay that he had written on the topic for the Peoria *Courier Journal*. What was even more amazing about Sasha's performance was that it was the day of his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday!

Sasha's accomplishments were matched by "the next Sasha" who spent a year with us at NCHS. Sasha Gorbach was a tall bundle of energy who spoke in a very demonstrative style both in his word choice and his flailing arms! He attended the Illinois Capitol Forum where he and three fellow Normal students represented their school

when discussing what America's role in the world with 200 other high school students. Sasha so impressed fellow students and faculty sponsors in the morning sessions of the Forum, that he was chosen to sit on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the afternoon session with two other students. For years later, fellow faculty sponsors would ask me about "our Russian Sasha" as he had left a positive impression.

Natalie Sablina had one of the most captivating smiles that I've ever encountered. She informed me when we first met that she liked school, but she was not "like the Sashas" when it came to grades. Her self-deprecating assessment of her academic possibilities was not warranted as she did well in my class, and her effervescent personality seared itself into my memory. I still cherish the photo she sent of herself upon her return home and her entry into Moscow State University where her captivating smile was once more on display!

All of the students from Vladimir have made the teaching of International Relations at NCHS easier as they've all acted as Ambassadors and have bridged numerous differences. I only hope the next 20 years that we'll keep having students come as it's been a wonderful relationship.

