



Left to Right: Jennifer Vincent, John Bentley, Sarah Phillips, Mike Maholchic, and Robin Lee.

Robin R. Lee, 38, a registered pharmacist with CVS, from Portsmouth, R. I., Sarah M. Phillips, 25, a Career Advisor at Brown University from Attleboro, Mass., Jennifer L. Vincent, 30, a student history teacher at Apponequet Regional High School from Berkley, Mass., John R. Bentley, 26, a Project Manager with Hess Corporation from Boston, Mass. travelled to Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia from May 3 to May 30, 2009 at the expense of the Rotary Foundation. They were accompanied by Michael Maholchic, 54, a database programmer at Senior Whole Health, LLC, in Cambridge, Mass., the District's coordinator for youth exchange students and past president of the Rotary Club of Milton, Mass. William A. Sherman, 29, Classified Advertising Manager at the Newport Daily News, of Newport, R. I. was selected as an alternate member of the team.

The awards involve four-week visits, during which team members share homes with Rotary families, experience the host country's institutions and ways of life, observe their own vocations as practiced abroad, develop personal and professional relationships, and exchange ideas with their professional counterparts. They have prepared a presentation

on “Work and Culture in New England” to present to Russian Rotary clubs and other groups.

An incoming team from Russia visited the Boston suburbs from April 25, to May 23, 2009. During their stay they lived with local Rotarians and were involved in vocational and cultural events similar to the American team’s experience.

This exchange is the culmination of a three year effort by Stephen C. Silverman, Governor of Rotary District 7950 (covering of South-eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island). "When I opened my home to a Russian teacher in 2003 I did not expect my heart to be opened as well to a people I had been raised, in the fifties, to fear," he said, “yet that exchange led to my establishing a relationship with my Russian counterpart, and is the realization of a dream.”

At the end of January the group went to Northeast Link conference in Boxborough, MA where they met with other GSE teams. They were part of a program which has sent over 32,000 individuals overseas on exchange tours since 1965. Ambassador Paul Taylor cautioned the group not to make comparisons between countries – even to avoid saying something was better in Russia than in the United States – because that would lead down a path to an unhelpful conversation. On several occasions, this advice proved useful in Russia.

Among the Russian cities on their itinerary:

1. Ivanovo, population 406,000 (about 200 miles from Moscow)

Textile capital of Russia since the 1560s

Known as the “City of Brides” because of the overwhelmingly female population in the early 20th century

Home of the University of Chemistry and Technology

2. Vladimir, population 315,000 (about 70 miles from Ivanovo)

Medieval capital of the major Russian principality

Two cathedrals that are World Heritage sites

3. Moscow population 10,382,000 – 60 miles from Vladimir

Largest metropolitan area in the world

Parks six times larger than Central Park

The most expensive city in the world to live in

4. Cherepovets, population 311,800 – 325 miles from Moscow

Major industrial center, Severstal steel mill and chemical plants

Large port on the Volga and Seksna rivers

5. St. Petersburg, population 4,662,000

Major cultural center of Russia

World famous Hermitage museum, Peterhof castle

Location of District conference

In Ivanovo, John and Mike stayed with Viktor and Rotarian Nadezhda Dormidontova and their son Aleksey. Their son in law, Valery Sokhan, was the Team Leader for the Russian team in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Their vocational day was May 4th, which began at the multi-specialty health clinic “Milenaris”, and continued at the Ivanovo State University for Electrical Engineering. They toured the college with the director of Advanced English Studies, Natalya Dudareva. The following day they toured a middle school where the GSE chair’s mother Irina Ledyeva was an English teacher. Jennifer and Sarah, both working in the education field, were particularly impressed by the good manners of the students – who stood for them as we entered – and by their good English, and detailed knowledge of the NBA and the NHL. Jennifer is a high school teacher, and was very excited to discuss ideas with the Russian students for use in her own classroom setting in Massachusetts.



May 6 - Students at Ivanovo middle school

At the beautiful home of John and Mike's host Russian family in Ivanovo, members of the group experienced the Russian banya for the first time. The banya is akin to a sauna in the United States, and is very popular for healthy living among many Russians. During the Rotary meeting they sat for hours around a fire, eating, drinking, and enjoying the companionship of a circle of friends. Many members of the club accompanied them on a trip to the old city of Yaroslavl.



May 5, 2009 - Overlooking the Volga in Yaroslavl with members of the Ivanovo Rotary Club

Left to right, John Bentley, Michael Maholchic, Jennifer Vincent, Sergey Kornev (President), Eugenia Ledyeva, Robin Lee, Ruslan Umlatov, Darius, Lena, their daughter

One particularly interesting stop was at a tour of an old church. Upon seeing Robin's Rotary badge, he discovered the group was American. He immediately greeted the group in English, and asked for the group to wait for him while he changed into his religious vestments. He then invited the group to climb up some rickety wooden steps in the bell tower and ring the bells over the city. As it is extremely rare for anyone to enter the bell tower, this was a unique honor bestowed upon the group. He provided a demonstration of bell-ringing which involved an intricately complex set of ropes and foot pedals to create a particular pattern for the bells.



The team had a very interesting visit to the old village of Plyos where they visited a traditional cottage (“izba”) where Nadezhda and Mike were dressed up in traditional costumes, and re-enacted an engagement ceremony.



(May 7th - Izba Museum, Plyos, Michael Maholchic, Nadezhda Dormidontova, museum guide)

In Vladimir, the team was especially grateful to Colonel Viktor Lebedev, who made sure we got a close up view of the Victory Day celebration in the main square. The size and solemnity of the occasion reminded them of the great sacrifices Russia made to defeat fascism. By restoring its monuments and remembering its dead, Russia showed the team it is a nation that remembers its past to build a better future.



(May 9th - Veterans and pioneers at Victory Day celebration, Vladimir)

While in Vladimir, the local Rotary Club coordinated a tour of a nearby town called Suzdal, which had many recently restored churches and monasteries, as well as an open air market.



(May 10 - Walking on the ramparts by the Golden Gates (1164), Vladimir)

The professional day included a tour of a drug distribution company, Hiratrade, the regional statistics office, the local vodka factory “Vladalko” with a taste test, and the Vladimir Institute of Tourism and Hospitality. They subsequently went to the "American Home,” built in the American style by Americans who were flown to Russia for that purpose. All the materials except the stone were brought in from America. Ron and Susan Pope founded the project in the hopes of creating a center for American businesses to facilitate tourism in Vladimir. No businesses have used the center in this way, but college exchange programs have used the home for teaching English.

In Moscow they visited two Rotary Clubs, Moscow International which conducts its business in English, and Moscow – Stolitsa.



May 13 – presentation at Moscow International Rotary Club

Left to right, Michael Maholchic, Judith Ann Bailey, Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar, John Bentley, Thomas Kaufman, Robin Lee, Sarah Phillips, Kiril Vinogradov, Jennifer Vincent

In Moscow the team saw the famous Red Square and made use of its very impressive transit system. In museums they saw many ornate treasures, clothes, and coaches. Some of the group thought these were relics from a ruling class which may have taken more than its fair share of society’s resources, and for that reason was swept away in 1917. Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar Aaron Blomme spent two days with the team, showing them a tremendous number of sites, including the graveyard by Novoe Dorimdetovo

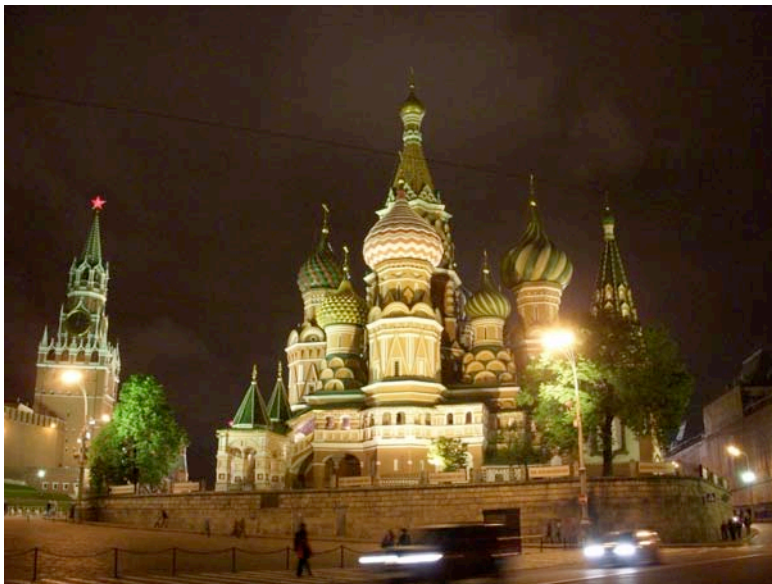
Monastery, where writers, composers, and artists are given equal honor to politicians and generals in death. Aaron is Russian Orthodox and he took them to Mass at Sretensky Monastery in Moscow that was literally standing room only.

For their professional day in Moscow, most of the team toured Moscow State University. Mike accompanied Rotarian Gordon Dowsley to a lunch meeting with an insurance executive, followed by a tour of the Moscow subway system – which is truly incredible, with high quality building materials, beautiful designs, and fast, efficient service.



Details from Moscow subway station

The challenges and opportunities of doing business in Russia were discussed frankly, and they appreciated that special insight.



In Cherepovets, no effort was spared to make the trip interesting and full of activity. The local Rotary Club worked hard to feed, house, and entertain the team. Through the efforts of incoming president Svetlana Chelnokova and her husband Pavel, they received a special honor in touring the Severstal steel mill. Pictures were not allowed inside the factory, but a group shot was taken outside. Later in the day, the team met with the city government's director of foreign affairs and received information about investment opportunities in the city.



May 20 – Left – in front of Severstal. Right – a meeting at Cherepovets City Hall, left to right, Sergey Murashkin, president – Rotary Club of Cherepovets-Sheksna, Sarah Phillips, Robin Lee, Jennifer Vincent, John Bentley, Sergey S. Belyaev, Director of Foreign Affairs Division, Michael Maholchic, Svetlana Chelnokova (Rotary Club president 2009-2010).



In St. Petersburg they had the pleasure of meeting President D. K. Lee's representative Dan Moores and his wife Shirley. They were guests of the White Nights Rotary Club and the International Rotary Club. Rotarians Natalya Nikolaeva, Irina Zavolokina, and Marina Drobysheva took them to every major tourist attraction in the city. The Rotarians treated them to a very moving cultural evening of the ballet *Swan Lake*.



Robin Lee, a Rhode Island pharmacist, toured a Russian pharmacy in St. Petersburg with the help of Russian translator Irina Zavolokina. She facilitated the exchange of information with Russian pharmacy purchasing agent Svetlana V. Gazarian, who oversaw operations at the Ava-Peter Russian-Finnish Clinic.

Rotary (www.rotary.org) is a global service organization of over 1.3 million professional men and women in over 31,000 clubs who share the common goals of promoting peace and international understanding through service projects. The Rotary Foundation has sent over 66,000 people on Group Study Exchanges at a cost of nearly \$100 million since the program began in 1965. Persons between the ages of 25 and 40 who have been actively engaged in a recognized business or profession for at least two years are eligible to take part in GSE.

Next year the local Rotary District exchange will be with Uruguay. Interested professionals from the area can apply for future exchanges by contacting their local Rotary club. APPLICATIONS ARE BEING ACCEPTED FROM NOW THROUGH OCTOBER 1, 2009. For additional information, please call:

David I. Clifton, (GSE Committee Co-Chair, Sharon Rotary Club) Phone (508) 230-8666 (diclifton@comcast.net), Caryn Smith (GSE Committee Co-Chair, Quincy Rotary Club) Phone (617) 479-3451(caryncorner@aol.com)