

## PORTSMOUTH SEVERODVINSK CONNECTION FALL 2011 NEWSLETTER

Please note – This newsletter is available in electronic form as a Word document should you wish to forward it to anyone. Just contact the editor and it will be e-mailed to you. Articles are written by editor Alex Herlihy, unless otherwise noted. (alexherlihy@comcast.net)

### Oyster River HS Hosts Visit from Severodvinsk School

The November 2011 exchange between Oyster River High School and Severodvinsk City Gymnasium #14 was a resounding success. Once again we played host to an excellent delegation from Severodvinsk that consisted of eleven students, three teachers and one spouse of a teacher. The leaders included old friends, teacher Katya Boikova and vice principal Lyuda Ermolina. The highlight of our experience was meeting with the delegation from Archangelsk who were visiting with Portland High School. Lots of ideas were discussed about how to further environmental action on both sides of the Atlantic. Emails were swapped so that the discussion can continue into the future. We were able to make many excursions in the two weeks, including visits to Concord (state house and NH Forest Society), Cornish and the Black History Trail in Portsmouth. Many friends were made during the two-week visit and conversations continue on the recently-formed Facebook page. (Oyster River and Severodvinsk exchange) Preparations are being made for a reciprocal visit by another group of ORHS students in the spring, continuing the series of great opportunities afforded our future leaders.

Matt Pappas, Oyster River HS (Note – These two schools were originally connected by a State Dept. grant 2001-03, but this year they decided to create a permanent exchange which will greatly enhance the work of PSC.

### A Sample of Severodvinsk Student's Impressions From Recent Visit

"My first trip to America was filled with impressions and feelings. I loved my host family; it felt like my family in Russia." "I think that many people in America are hospitable and friendly." "People at school were very friendly and always smiled." "America amazed me. People here are very kind and host family took care of us like our parents. I found many new friends." "I am glad to share my knowledge about ecology and discuss solutions to different ecological problems." "The teachers are awesome and the nature of New Hampshire is gorgeous." "Our excursions to Boston, Cornish and Portsmouth were great. We had so many interesting classes; fiber arts and drumming were my favorites. Working together with students from Portland and Archangelsk helped to find new ways of solving urgent ecological problems. Thank you so much for the possibility of being part of this important program."

### Northeast America Meets Northwest Russia in Wells, Maine

How do we know that citizen diplomacy works? We may soon find out after a historic gathering at the Rachel Carson Wildlife Preserve in Wells, Maine on Nov. 6<sup>th</sup>. Oyster River HS in Durham was hosting a reciprocal visit from its exchange school - Severodvinsk Gymnasia #14 and Portland HS was hosting an inaugural visit from Archangel School #6. Thanks to the efforts of PSC and the Archangel Committee of Greater Portland the English speaking Russian students and their American hosts gathered in mixed groups. They discussed environmental problems and solutions, heard from one of the Preserves volunteers about her environmental

odyssey, listened to messages from the two sister city groups about the need to increase communication and finished the day by bonding on a nature walk. International exchange stretches us and helps to fulfill our longing to get beyond the drum beat of nationalism to real world citizenship. And where will this lead? What is the point of this effort beyond a nice cultural gathering? The students will answer these questions with their words and deeds. They are the next generation of sister city activists who will take our work of the last twenty years to a higher level.

## PSC Member Makes Professional Forestry Visit to Siberia

John Brissette, US Forest Service in Durham, visited Severodvinsk as part of the “troika delegation” PSC sent last year, but most of his Russian experience has been in the Krasnoyarsk region of Siberia working with Russian foresters. He returned there for a visit this past August and his interesting report may be found on our website ([www.psconnection.org](http://www.psconnection.org))

### Visit from Russian Delegation – June 2011

by Roland Goodbody

There were five Russians came out of the east  
Their knowledge to advance

And our fervent hope it was Relations to enhance  
(adapted from the folk song “John Barleycorn”)

“John Barleycorn” tells of a process whose results are more significant than anyone involved could have anticipated. The connection we on the Seacoast have forged over the last nearly twenty years with one particular city in Russia has much the same potential. Since 1994, the sister cities of Severodvinsk on the White Sea in Northwest Russia and Portsmouth on the North Atlantic have hosted a series of mutual visits involving schoolchildren, ordinary citizens, specialist groups such as journalists, and on one occasion, Alexander Beliaev, the Mayor of Severodvinsk. The original, and ongoing, focus and intent of these exchanges, however, has been environmental in nature. As the homes of nuclear submarine facilities, Severodvinsk and Portsmouth have much to learn from each other about how to adapt from a militarized Cold War situation to a more healthy and sustainable relationship, both with the environment and with each other. This past summer, in our ongoing attempt to foster such efforts, the PSC welcomed to the Seacoast five young Russian professionals who work in the area of environmental protection so that they could see first-hand what is being done here.

Yelena Kharitinóva (Lyena) and Zaur Abdulláyev, both of whom work for the city of Severodvinsk, Nadezhda Gagárina (Nádiya), a business lawyer, Anastasiyah Mityukova (Náhstiyah), chief environmental officer for Ecology-Nord, a solid waste company, and Vídas Kryauchyunas, a research scientist at the Arctic Ecology Research Institute in Archangelsk (Archangel), thirty miles from Severodvinsk, were the members of the group. They stayed with Lois Fonda and with Tom and Ellen Simmonds in Rye and were kept busy with a week brimful of activity that included professional visits to UNH, the Durham Wastewater Treatment Facility, the Turnkey landfill in Rochester (6000 tons of waste per day!), Concord, C-10 in Newburyport (<http://c-10.org/index.html>), and a session with five non-profit organizations in the Seacoast area, as well as a trip to the NHSPCA facility in Stratham (a special request of Lyena’s, who is responsible for dealing with stray animals, mostly dogs, in Severodvinsk).

The group also attended the annual meeting of the Seacoast Anti-Pollution League, visited the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve at Laudholm Farm on the way to meeting members of the Portland-Archangelsk Committee,

who gave them a brief tour of Portland and the impressive Liberty Ship Memorial, and then invited them to a neighborhood block party. Coincident with the delegation's visit, the documentary film, *My Perestroika*, was shown at The Loft in downtown Portsmouth, which our guests attended and commented on afterwards. They got to visit the new gundalow under construction and mess about on the older one, and they enjoyed a number of social events, the largest of which was the midweek party at Hart House, the home of Dick and Sally Smyser, on the banks of the Piscataqua in New Castle. Russians and Americans gathering for White Nights celebration; this is what PSC does best.

## Oyster River HS Visits Severodvinsk, April 2011

Last April, three adults and six students traveled to Severodvinsk, Russia as part of an educational exchange between Oyster River High School and Severodvinsk's Gymnasium #14. The two weeks we spent in Russia were life changing for all of us. Frankly, it's difficult to describe how the trip affected us collectively, because the things that resonated with each of us were quite different, but the one commonality was the kindness and hospitality that we encountered in every setting.

We visited several schools throughout the city including magnet schools focused on environmental science and English education, a primary school that immersed students in English and a school for students with disabilities that had sensory rooms and iMacs with communications programs. In every setting, students were invested in showing us the best things about their schools, whether that be in-school museums, cultural centers or science laboratories. We visited with the vice mayor and other city officials as well as the editors of one of the city's newspapers. Regardless of where our hosts guided us, we were treated to tarts, pies and cookies, tea and coffee. We were made to feel welcome and as if our presence was being celebrated wherever we went. One of the things we hadn't anticipated was the sense of obligation we felt to be the best representatives we could of our country and local community.

My husband and I were both born in the early 60's and our own experience growing up during the Cold War colored our perceptions of the trip. In some respects the kindness of the people almost overwhelmed us given our memories of strained relations between the US and USSR. Our other chaperone was a bit younger, and her experience was made even more poignant by her family's Russian roots and her appreciation for the customs we encountered during our stay. For the students, there was a deepening awareness of the similarities that exist between young people, their shared dreams and concerns for the future, regardless of geography. All of us know in our hearts that we have far more in common than we ever imagined and that we are better people for having known our friends from Severodvinsk. Laura Rogers, former principal of Oyster River HS

## Looking Backward to 1991

In the life of a people, what is a nation? Is it an idea that develops over time with evolving culture, common suffering and yearning for a better life? Is what we call Russia more a state of mind, something tidal, with all the ebbs and flows of empire and struggles for freedom? It is certainly more than nationalism. Perhaps these lines from their poet Lermontov best express their sense of country: "I love my country but my love is strange and rare, a love that reason cannot change. It is not my countries victories, nor fame so dearly bought with blood, nor ancient claim of rich tradition and command that stir sweet reveries about my native land. Not these bring quiet joy. I love – I know not why – her rivers at the flood like seas, the voices of her boundless forest trees, the frozen silence of her plains in snow...." Americans understand the poet from our anthem: "for amber waves of grain, for purple mountains majesty."

That the Russian people ended three quarters of a century of dictatorship with almost no bloodshed is a tribute to their emotional and spiritual life. Listen to words from letters which Russian friends wrote twenty winters ago as they tried to see the future: "We thought we were living in a dream and awoke to discover it was a nightmare. We are beginning to revive and see the time when we will live in civilized society. Cheer up! The birds are singing. Lets hope for the common sense of the people and a better future for our kids. A constant sense of doom always goes with you because you never know what to expect from the nearest future; still I am an optimist. Everything has become unbalanced, but we will never return to the old times with meat and sausages but chains everywhere, humiliation and false ideas. (and from the poet Tyutchev, my friend quotes:) Russia is both ugly and grand, poor and rich, it is something you cannot comprehend or compare with anything. It is something to be felt and believed in."

International exchange breaks down nationalistic borders and reminds us that we are all citizens of the world. Knowing Russians has taught us that they are not so inscrutable, but warm and hospitable, wise and witty and, like their endlessly flowing rivers and forests, deep and abiding. For us, the poet's lines ring true. We have come to feel and believe in Russia.

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The reflections of Macy Morse, founder of PSC and Jim Splaine, charter member, will soon appear on our web site in an expanded E-newsletter. Macy and others are also preparing PSC archives to be donated to the Portsmouth Library for research. 2012 offers promise for PSC as English speaking students open more doors for us with other Russians. Please pass this newsletter and brochure (on web site: [www.psconnection.org](http://www.psconnection.org)) on to friends. Spahseebah.