

# Soviets get planned parenthood advice

By Hon Walker  
Emerald Associate Editor

In October 1988, a delegation from Eugene's Soviet sister city of Irkutsk brought home a number of souvenirs from their first official visit to the United States.

Among the souvenirs were a few newsletters written by Eugene Planned Parenthood education director Mary Widoff.

The newsletters, titled "There's No Place Like Home ... For Sex Education," were distributed in the United States last January. Now, they have been translated into Russian and will be distributed throughout the Soviet Union as well.

Widoff returned Sunday from a visit to the Soviet Union, where she appeared on a national television program as a representative of Planned Parenthood.

She also spoke to teachers and other groups on a topic that is now receiving more attention as sexuality issues in the country are being brought into the open.

"Essentially, there is no sex education," she said.

In the Soviet Union, as in the United States, Widoff said, sexuality is a taboo topic that most adults are embarrassed to discuss. "They're a lot more reserved about it than we are," she said.

However, many in the nation are realizing that sex education is needed in a school system

that does not even offer basic health courses, she said.

"They've reached the point where they understand that there are enough problems in the area of sexuality that they have to educate in the schools," Widoff said.

Unwanted pregnancy is a problem in Soviet culture. Birth control is expensive, difficult to obtain, and often of poor quality, Widoff said. On the other hand, abortion is free, making it the nation's leading method of birth control.

The average Soviet woman receives eight or nine abortions in her life, presenting a grave health risk, she said.

Even if more birth control methods were available, taboo and shame still would shroud the issue, and it would be necessary for attitudes to change before behavior does, she said.

Some Soviets Widoff spoke to were concerned about having sex education imported to their young people there, considering the United States has one of the highest rates of abortion and unintended pregnancy despite its sex education programs.

However, the Soviets incorrectly concluded that sex education here is consistent and effective from community to community, which it is not, she said.

"They think that we do a lot of sex education and that we do

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