

Americans meet Russians through sister-city pairing project

by Bob Lothian

President Reagan refers to Russia as the "evil empire," and movies like "Red Dawn" exploit Americans' fears of the Soviets. But through a unique project, many Americans are learning that behind the cold war facade are Russian people a lot like us. It's called the Ground Zero Pairing Project, started in the spring of 1982 by PSU professor Dr. Earl Molander. The project, which began in Molander's garage and now involves over 1,000 U.S. communities, is aimed at building a bridge of peace through cultural exchanges between U.S. and Russian cities.

Communities that are similar in population, economy and surroundings are paired. Then they exchange a community portrait, something like a time capsule containing photographs, letters of friendship and pictures from schoolchildren, newspapers and general information. Project organizers hope to involve over 2,000 U.S. communities by the end of 1984, one for each ICBM, submarine launched missile and bomber in the U.S. strategic force, according to Molander. The long term goal of the project, he said, is "to move beyond the muddle of historical stereotypes" and establish direct communication with the Russians as people, to prevent nuclear war.

"The American people know very

little about the Soviet Union," said Joni Meisner, director of field operations for the project. Most Americans don't realize, for instance, she said, that there is a Russian peace movement organized independently of the Soviet government. "They are much more peace-oriented than people think." Part of the reason, she said, is that the Russians still carry the memory of their terrible ordeal in WWII, when an estimated 20,000,000 Russians died to defeat Fascism. Through working on the Pairing Project, said Meisner, she has come to realize that many Russians have

the attitude that "We want peace more than you do — you don't know what it's like to see people killed in your back yard." Portland was paired with far eastern Soviet city of Khabarovsk, 200 miles from the Pacific Ocean near Japan, with a population of 660,000. A large river, the Amur, runs through the city, and nearby forests provide a wood products base for the economy, similar to Portland. Portland's community portrait was put together by families and school children and included an official letter of greeting from city



JONI MEISNER
(Photo: Kris Altucher)

commissioners Strachon and Lindberg. It was sent to Khabarovsk in November, 1983.

The Russian city reciprocated with a community portrait that was recently on display in the lobby of the Portland Building. Many of the pictures sent by Russian school children were about peace. In "March of Peace," for instance, by Tanya Shepyana, 14, a large group of people wearing different colored clothes and with different skin colors held hands around a globe circled by doves. A letter from the students of School Number 12 in Khabarovsk came with the exhibit. "Like all people of good will we want to live in peace and friendship," they

wrote. The students of our school take an active part in the struggle for peace. For instance, this year we held meetings in support of a peaceful foreign policy for our country, antiwar songs, concerts, antiwar posters and festivals." Meisner said that many children and adults in Portland are becoming pen pals with counterparts in Khabarovsk, and that relations have been established with Soviet government agencies. The Khabarovsk exhibit is available for schools, libraries and community organizations, she said, and she can be reached at 245-3519.

Black state legislators to meet

It was announced by Senator Clarence Mitchell, III, State of Maryland and President of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators that the non-partisan organization's eighth annual conference would be held in Los Angeles, California, November 27 - December 2, 1984 at the Los Angeles Hilton Hotel. "On behalf of the more than 350 Black elected legislators and lawmakers in the country, I wish to express sincere appreciation to the California Black Caucus for hosting this year's national conference. We are looking forward to a gathering which will be historical in terms of its far-reaching effect upon the lives of those whom we represent." Co-Chairs are Speaker Willie Brown and Assemblywoman Gwen Moore. They jointly expressed their satisfaction with the overall agenda for planned workshops, plenary sessions, a community forum, and special events.



GWEN MOORE

The slated breakfasts, luncheons and banquets will bring together leading voices in America that will address hard-hitting issues of priority to Blacks and all people in general. Keynote speakers include: Nov. 27—Speaker Willie Brown, California - Community Forum Nov. 31—Rev. Wyatt T. Walker, Canaan Baptist Church, New York, Church Day Speaker Nov. 31—Congressman Parren Mitchell, Maryland, Awards Banquet to Black Mayors The convention program includes Labor Day, Corporation Day, Church and Special Issues Day and Special Events Day which will feature a reception/luncheon/fashion show on December 1st. Senator Mitchell is asking that all citizens in the Los Angeles Community redouble their energies and make a special effort to attend the conference. "This will be a wonderful opportunity for the residents to meet firsthand their Black State Legislators and be heard. Our legislators' cooperation and support have been exceptional. There is power in numbers. We welcome everyone." Inquiries are welcomed at the Convention Manager's Office. Kindly call (818) 995-6545.

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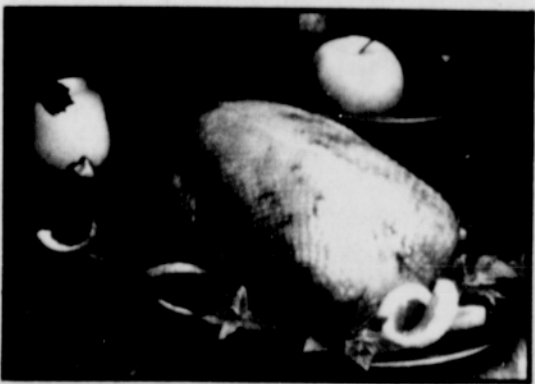
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