

VC arranges exchange with Leningrad school

By Michele Liberti-Lansing
VOORHEESVILLE — One morning in March, a group of third graders noisily filed into their public school. Soon thereafter, the familiar refrain of the "alphabet song" exuberantly reverberated throughout their classroom — not an uncommon occurrence in your typical American schoolroom. However, the scene described is not set in this country, but in the Soviet Union — in Leningrad's Public School No. 80.

After witnessing these enthusiastic Soviet youngsters, singing their American songs and reciting their American poems, Robert Streifer, Voorheesville Central High School's Language Department chairman, believes more strongly than ever, that children are our "window to the future." "What I found most exciting was that the Russian kids were very natural, all smiles, proud... fairly uninhibited — they represented to me, the new generation of Soviet people," he said.

Because of a 10-day business trip to Russia, where a team of Voorheesville administrators arrived in Leningrad to meet with their Soviet counterparts, plans for an exchange between VCHS and Leningrad's School No. 80 have been finalized, the exchange to commence in January 1991.

"It took about six days for us to hammer out the agreement," said Arthur Willis, VCHS Social Studies Department chairman, and member of the entourage. Willis said the bulk of the trip was spent meeting with Soviet educational officials in Leningrad, Moscow, and Kiev. Both Willis and Streifer said they were particularly pleased with the manner in which Andrei Ibragimov, Vice Chairman of the Leningrad branch of the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies, handled communication between the two countries, prior to their arrival in the Soviet Union.

Said Willis, "Mr. Ibragimov is a very bright, talented man... however, I didn't expect him to understand exactly what needed to be done — and to do it. I was quite concerned that things wouldn't line up. We had a very hard time communicating between Albany and Leningrad, prior to the trip. I didn't realize how incredibly far-seeing Ibragimov is... I was enormously pleased to find that he had anticipated our every need, and every need of the people on that side. From then on, it was just a matter of sitting down and hammering out the agreement."

Willis said Ibragimov also brought in two key Soviet education officials, without whom the exchange would not have been possible — Dr. Nina Burkova, who heads the International Department Committee on Edu-

cation, Leningrad branch, and Dr. Irina Yakimenko, chairwoman of the House of Young Pioneer (an organization which handles all international exchanges).

The "deal" between the two schools was finalized on March 27 and involves an exchange of 15 students and four teachers. The Leningrad group will arrive in Voorheesville in January 1991 for a three-week stay; Voorheesville will journey to the Soviet Union in April of that year. While visiting, Soviet students will be exposed to American education and culture by attending classes and taking field trips to historic points of interest. Acculturation to family life will be achieved through the home stay experience, where the Soviet teenager will "shadow the American host brother or sister," said Streifer.

He said a committee is currently being formed to oversee the management of the home stay experience. The panel, which will include parents, community, and school members, will organize criteria for participation in the Russian exchange. Said Streifer, "We need to determine the qualities of young people, qualities that will lend themselves to being a constructive part of this experience, not only as a host but as a participant overseas; also, to help identify the faculty who will be exchange teachers as well." Streifer said criteria considered might include prior international travel experience, leadership qualities, and academics.

"There's a committee forming now, through Albany-Schenectady-Schoharie BOCES, that will be working with Dr. Custer Quick, BOCES superintendent, and assistant superintendent of BOCES, Donna Trautwein. We and BOCES will be developing a curriculum in international education, a program of study that would explore international culture through history, art, and language, and would use a team teaching approach.

"What we'll aim to do is create a curriculum that will prepare our students for the home stay experience... what kind of knowledge they'll need, and what techniques they'll need to face the challenge of being a home stay student," explained Streifer. "The philosophy of the program is to enable kids, in the future, to function in a more global society, because of the demands that will be put on them."

According to Streifer, "BOCES spearheaded the effort, partly because of financial reasons... districts that participate in the program, through their superintendents, will actually receive financial aid. BOCES is serving as a support mechanism for schools in general...



Sealing the Voorheesville-Leningrad deal. From left: Dr. Nina Burkova, Chairwoman for the International Department, Committee on Education, Leningrad branch; Dr. Alan McCartney, VCHS superintendent; and Andrei Ibragimov, Vice Chairman, Union of Soviet Friendship Societies, Leningrad branch.

for involvement in international education and as a clearinghouse for grants and other financial assistance needs, that would enable this program to reach the greatest number of students possible, at by far the least cost."

Streifer continued, "Collaborating with BOCES does not mean a change in direction for us. It just means a facilitation of a task. It will also place a lesser burden on taxpayers... it's a very prudent measure, because of the financial payback districts receive from BOCES."

Streifer stressed that the upcoming exchange is not only a physical one, exchanging people for people — but that it is an exchange of curriculum (ideas and methods), literature, and letters. He said a telecommunications link would be estab-

lished, by next year, between VCHS and School No. 80. A computer-to-computer electronic mail link will run from Voorheesville to the BOCES center; from BOCES to a satellite station in San Francisco; from San Francisco to Moscow; and from Moscow to Leningrad.

"With this technology, we'll have near-simultaneous communication," says an elated Streifer. "For example, if we have a computer class at 8 a.m. here, and send messages or other text to Leningrad, with the eight-hour time difference, at four in the afternoon in the Soviet Union, there would be simultaneous communication."

Streifer said the district may also utilize a "luma-phone" terminal, which incorporates a camera, telephone, and playback system all in one, en-

abling correspondents to see each other, simultaneously, on a split-image screen, as they speak. (Scotia-Glenville Central School is already using the luma-phone with a school in Moscow). "This (communications system) is not an elitist activity," he stressed. "It's meant to open everyone's eyes, to encourage widescale participation."

Plans are already underway for an American-Soviet penpal exchange. During VCHS's Humanities Open House last month, about 70 students signed up requesting a Soviet penpal, related Streifer. The students' names and addresses were brought to School 80's principal, Ludmilla Shulyakova, who will locate students from the school's English classes for their Voorheesville pals.

Streifer said what most excited him was the awareness and openness of the third-grade class, especially when the children, who were unaware of their American visitors, were observed singing the alphabet song. "That really charmed me," he said. (Public School No. 80, a "magnet" school, begins English language instruction as early as the third grade).

Streifer said the point that was most driven home during the group's Russian excursion was the heightened awareness that the United States is a member of a global community, and that today's children are indeed the key to peace and understanding among nations. "I really do believe that democratic changes in the Soviet Union will be irreversible if they're accomplished by young people," said Streifer.

"The Soviet people are very warm, very outgoing. The dif-

(Continued on Page 12)

Painting's A Breeze with COOK & DUNN Quality Paints



ROYAL ONE COAT
 Spatterless Latex Flat
\$14.69/gal.

Reg. \$18.69

- Available in 100 decorator colors and white.

RUSTIC STAIN
 Oil Base Exterior
\$13.99/gal.

Reg. \$19.99

- 50 architect-approved solid & semi-transparent colors.



DECK STAIN
 Repels Water
\$16.99/gal.

Reg. \$21.99

- Ideal for Pressure Treated Lumber.



ONE COAT SELF-PRIMING
 Latex House Paint
\$16.69/gal.

Reg. \$21.69

- Full range of historic & contemporary colors.

"Catch the Savings!"



Sale Ends May 19, 1990.



Robinson's
HARDWARE

1874 Western Ave.
 Albany, N.Y.
 Hardware 456-7383
 Auto Parts 456-2337

Both Stores OPEN: Monday-Friday 8-6; Saturday 8-5; Sunday 9-3

Not all merchandise may be offered for sale by all dealers. Available at participating dealers only, while supplies last.

COOK & DUNN makes painting child's play!

"Thinking Auction" Think Cater's

Now Booking Spring and Summer Sales
 Complete and Partial Contents
 of Homes and Estates Purchased

Box AD, Gallupville, NY 12073
 Tel: 518-872-2510

"Home of the Fox Creek Flea Market"