



# Fall 1999 Newsletter

## Musical Bridges, Inc.

Corporate Office: 604 Rood Pond Road, Williamstown, Vermont 05679 USA

Tel: (978) 562-5287, Fax: (978) 562-4711, Email: [root@musicalbridges.org](mailto:root@musicalbridges.org)

Web: <http://www.musicalbridges.org>



Rick Chapo (left) with Dima Ilyin and friend at Robert Romano's birthday party. Dima works at Epos, Ltd., a Chita trading firm that is helping with our container to Chita.



Robert's birthday again: Technical Univ. English professors Olga Fleshler and Natalya Gollib. Olga came to Southern Connecticut State Univ. in New Haven in September.



Elvira Baldanova (right) and friend. Ms. Baldanova is Principal of Dul'durga's high school where Grae Waters teaches. Through her efforts, Grae Waters is now the first native speaker to teach English outside the capital city in Chita Region.

*Access, opportunity and good neighbors through cultural exchange  
for the formerly closed Siberian city of Chita and Chita Region*



# Musical Bridges, Inc.

## Updates

### August

- The container with over 12,000 pounds of books and computer parts, including 18 complete PCs, leaves for the Finnish port of Kotka, near the Russian border. After several weeks of delays, it leaves the Finno-Russian border for Chita, due to arrive in November.
- Teacher Robert Romano visits Musical Bridges in Vermont on his way to Russia. He teaches at the Pedagogical University, Pedagogical College and School 49, Chita's English magnet school.

### September

- Teachers Grae Waters and Richard Chapo fly from Seattle to Khabarovsk and then take the train to Chita. The day after his arrival, Rick is in the classroom teaching at the Technical University. Soon after, Grae is met at the edge of Dul'durga by the townspeople in native costume for the traditional greeting ceremony of bread and salt. He is the English resource for 1500 students and their teachers.
- A delegation of Technical University deans visits Southern Connecticut State University.
- Rick and Robert travel to Dul'durga to visit Grae for his 23rd birthday.
- The benefit concert-dinner with guest pianist André Watts at the home of Michael and Marina Varshisky in Greenwich, Connecticut takes place and is a great success. A memorable evening!
- 1998-99 teacher Stephen Houtsma presents a lecture about his Chita experiences at Central Presbyterian Church in Denver, Colorado.

### October

- Rick Chapo is guest speaker at a conference on indigenous peoples in the remote settlement of Charo.
- Robert Romano's 30th birthday party is attended by students and teachers from both Chita universities and covered by local television.

### November

- The town of Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky in western Chita Region learns about Grae's teaching in Dul'durga and requests a teacher for 2000-01. Word is getting out!

## Message from our President, Anne Dickinson

Dear Friends,

We now enter the season of giving in a time of great prosperity in our country. More than at any other time in the past 30 years we Americans have the means to make positive change in the world. As the only U.S. charitable organization devoted to the formerly closed Siberian city of Chita and Chita Region--a part of the world in deep crisis--Musical Bridges gives you a unique opportunity to have a direct, long lasting effect on these people's lives.

After only a few short years, Musical Bridges' projects have proven their value. By focusing on one place, Chita, we concentrate our efforts, developing productive relationships that really get something done. By focusing on English education, we help them perfect the single most effective tool for reaching out to the whole world from their remote and isolated corner of it. And by focusing on "access and opportunity through cultural exchange," we are helping people in Chita help themselves through knowledge of how the United States works, and most importantly, who the people are--people like you and me who, with our hard-won and fiercely defended sense of freedom and opportunity, are the ones who make it work.

To accomplish our goals we are in the midst of the transition from an all-volunteer organization to one with paid management. Our goals are big. They aren't easy, they can't be done without money, and it all won't happen over night, but we will stay until the job is done.

Please join our efforts by becoming a member of Musical Bridges. Your membership speaks strongly of your ongoing support for our work, and helps us develop the financial stability on which to base the expansion of current programs and the building of new ones. We are making measurable progress, but we need your help to sustain the mission. To the right is a breakdown of Musical Bridges' projected year 2000 budget that illustrates what we are working to accomplish.

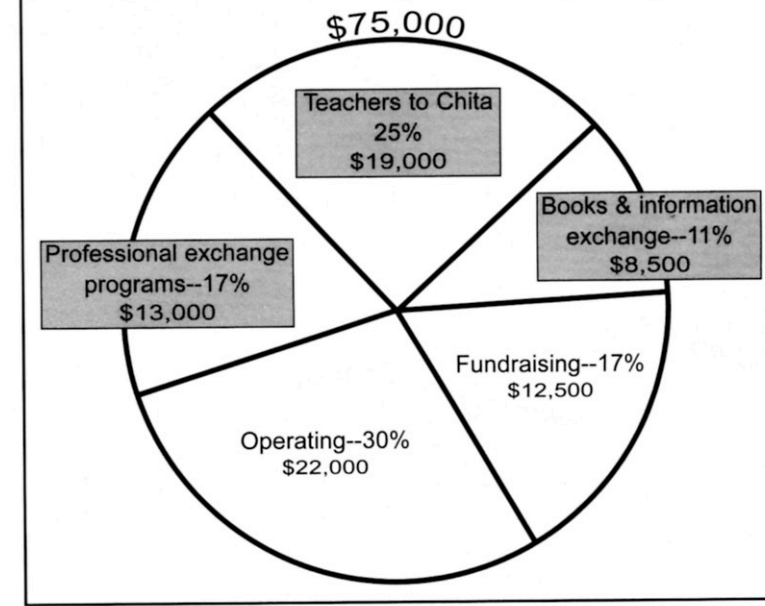
In this great season of remembering think of our neighbors in Chita and help us help them toward happiness and prosperity in the 21st century.

Best wishes to you and your family for a peaceful and plentiful New Year!

*Anne Z. Dickinson*

## Year 2000 projected budget

An ambitious budget--\$28,000 more than 1999--which focuses on expansion of exchange programs and allocates more monies for raising funds and operating.





## Emails from Chita

*Grae Waters, a Master's candidate in Russian at University of Washington, is teaching at the high school in Dul'durga (pop. 7000), 200 km from Chita*

October 20, 1999

Hello, Tom!

It's funny that you mention me not growing up in a place like this I often have a sense of *deja vu* because this place is a lot like where I grew up! :) [Ed Note: Grae grew up in Somerset, Kentucky]

Concerning Rick's message—I was pretty overwhelmed when he and Robert came here on my birthday last month. Don't worry, though...things are fine. The conditions are excellent. I eat too much, in fact, and I worry about getting too fat while I'm here! I still live in the hotel, and I hope to stay there. Somehow, I'm not sure I'd feel comfortable doing the host family thing. But *que sera sera*.

I am able to take showers in the polyclinic next door, I have a stove, and indoor facilities. The teaching was very difficult at first, and I complained a lot to Richard about it. First of all, I am not used to teaching high school. I have some students who don't even want to learn English. I, of course, didn't experience that while teaching Russian at Univ. of Washington! I was concerned at first that we would have no successes, because of trying to explain basic grammar, etc. I don't know how I would have done it without my Russian skills!

However, I am noticing a change in my younger students already, and my outlook has changed a lot. I think there will be a \*lot\* of success with the 7th and 8th graders. If we can get a teacher here next year, it will be very easy to work with these students (and the next year and the next, etc.) I hope plans are being made to continue the outreach to Dul'durga!

There is one teacher here, my contact Elvira Zhimbaeva, who is very interested in English, and all of her students share her excitement. Unfortunately, she's only been here one year, so all the students haven't benefitted from her teaching skills. We are working together on an entry to the Regional Teaching Exhibition, and we are just beginning work on developing better English materials for the students. Neither of us are satisfied with the textbooks, so we are going to try to make our own mini-books. So, that's what's happened since Richard and Robert were here in September.

On the other hand, I still have problems with loneliness and boredom! I'm so far away from everything! One thing I never thought of before I came here was that since there is no university here (of course) there are very few young people. And the few that are here are very busy—the farming life is demanding! So, I haven't really been able to make any friends here. I know lots of schoolchildren, but I can't spend all my free time with them, of course! I find myself at Elvira's place a lot, and I don't think it would be any good living here without her assistance. Musical Bridges has made a really good connection in her.

OK, that's all about me for now. Privet from Elvira and Larisa in the Communications office of Dul'durga!

Grae

*Richard Chapo, an attorney in San Diego, is teaching in the Humanities and Law Departments of Chita State Technical University in Chita.*

October 23, 1999

Hello again from that tourist mecca, Chita. Approximately two weeks have passed since my last literary masterpiece, so an update on events.

### HUMANITIES

The humanities classes are plugging along. I discovered that the students view the English classes as a hobby since very few of them believe they will be able to obtain a position as an interpreter in Chita. As a result, I have been teaching them about how to create a resume, post it on the internet and pursue specific positions around the world. They believe it is insignificant that they speak three languages fluently: Chinese, English and, of course, Russian. I am enlightening them to the truth. I am also in the process of getting them free e-mail on Yahoo for life. This is a bit more of a challenge than I expected since I have about 150 students! As soon as I have the addresses, I will forward them to each of you. These students are very bright and I think it would be educational for each of you to communicate directly with a Russian. [Ed. Note: if you are interested in getting on Rick's list, let us know.]

### LAW SCHOOL

Well, the students found the U.S. guilty for attacking Kosovo. The basic reason was the failure to get U.N. approval. I compared the leader of the Yugoslavian government to Hitler, which went over real well. Turns out the Russians believe the Yugoslavian Slavs are family. Regardless, we have been pursuing trials on issues such as abortion and the death penalty. The local television outlet appeared and taped one of the trials. I am a star in Chita. It is not enough that I am a foreigner, but now my face is on the boob tube. Now people point! If any of you can get Russian Channel 6, my hour-long interview will be played this Friday at 9:00 p.m. All and all, a good experience. The law school dean wants me to teach night school! Nyet!!!

### CHARO

On the 27th, I am going to speak at a Human Rights Conference in Charo, Russia. What and where is Charo? It is in the oh-my-god-its-cold northern reaches of Chita Region. Yesterday it was minus 43 Celsius in Charo. Oh my. Let me simply say it is considered one of the coldest and most beautiful places in the world. I will be speaking re a comparison of the treatment of indigenous people in the U.S. and Russia. The native population there are called Evenks, and this is their capital. They are hunt and gather types, but during communism they were forced to live in apartment buildings. The conference is addressing the issue of how to return them to their original lifestyle. I will suggest they build casinos!

I'll be considered the guest of honor and they are going to kill a reindeer for me. If I remember correctly from the Lonely Planet shows on the Travel Channel, I will have to eat the eye of the beast. Well, it beats vodka! Two local television news programs are going with me! A star is born. Better known as "look

*continued next page*



at the strange American!"

### ROBERT ROMANO'S BIRTHDAY PARTY

Robert Romano, [Ed. Note: Musical Bridges' teacher at the Pedagogical University in Chita], better known as "Lenin," turned 30 on October 20th—a depressing event. As a result, we rented a restaurant for about \$100. Now, a fundamental difference between the U.S. and Russia. In the U.S., you invite 30 people to a party and maybe 20 will show up. In Russia, you invite 30 people and a load show up. Depending on the particular point in the evening, there were 50 to 60 people. Unfortunately, we ordered food and booze for only 25, so . . . we ordered more! There was much drinking, dancing, etc. The party was made up of a variety of teachers from both the local universities, which turned out to be a good development because it smoothed a rivalry that exists between the Departments. . . I hope!

Most importantly, Robert was a happy camper. Even more so due to one of the television news shows appearing at 10:30—after much vodka—to interview him. By this time, Robert had found a cat and was petting it. So picture the interview: an inebriated Lenin standing there petting a cat and speaking American. You had to see it, but it was very funny.

### PRICES

One of the aspects that shocks my students is the difference in prices for Russia and the U.S. Following are common prices for items here in Chita, which is apparently considered an expensive place.

Authentic Smirnoff vodka - \$2.75 for a bottle, other vodka - as low as \$0.80 a bottle, Music CDs - \$1.00, Flight to Moscow and then U.S. - \$3,000, 2 liter bottle of Coke - \$3.00, 4 pastries - \$0.33, Chinese Top Ramen \$0.35 (eating right now!), Uncle Ben's Spaghetti Sauce - \$3.00, 2 onions and 4 oranges - \$1.00, 1 giant sausage & slab of cheese - \$3.00, 1 nice Russian suit with vest - \$90, Internet - \$20 for 20 hours, Snow on the trees - priceless.

### STRANGEST DISCOVERY OF THE WEEK

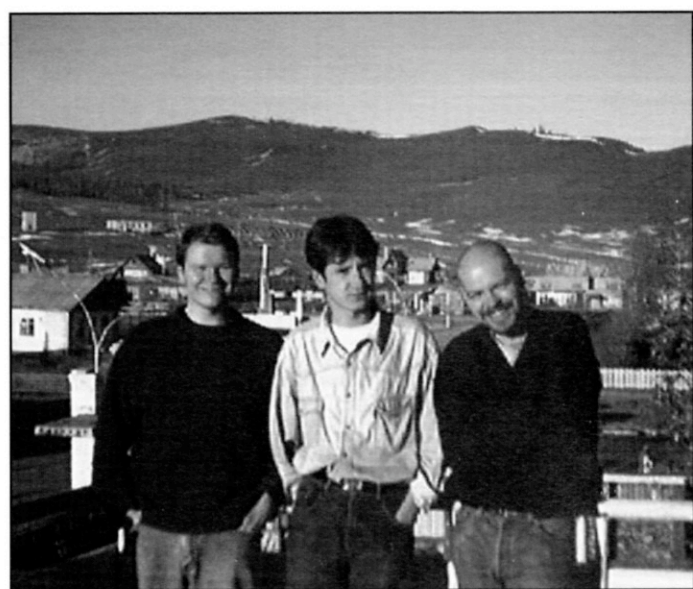
This past week it finally started getting cold, and I mean nose-running, ear lobe cracking, my-god-my-nose-is-gone cold. Friday morning was -10 Celsius. Despite this fact, Russians continue to walk the streets eating ICE CREAM! Russian ice cream is excellent, but it's cold outside! Amazing.

### NEW WORDS:

Spat = sleep, Spidt = AIDS, Moi = my, Dom = home, Zaitseva = Bunny, Amerikansky = American, Zeno = Chapo, Mr. Richard = Rick, Krasndor = cool, Cho = street slang for "What?", Ne Chogo = Nothing

Rick

*Special Note: Rick Chapo was awarded Musical Bridges' first "President's Award" for outstanding volunteer work. In the months before going to Chita, he collected thirty boxes of books, five computers, and pursued countless fund-raising leads for us, all with our encouragement and admiration...but without a single push! Big thanks, Rick!*



Grae Waters, Dima Ilyin of Epos, Ltd. and Robert Romano with Dul'durga in the background.



A stupa in Dul'durga, where Grae Waters is teaching, built for the Dalai Lama's visit in 1993.



At the André Watts benefit-recital, September 30th. From left: Musical Bridges President Anne Dickinson, Mr. Watts, MB Secretary Jean Dickinson, MB Board Member Ginger Jones, MB Vice-President Charles Dickinson and MB Board Chairman Thomas Dickinson

*If you have questions or comments for Rick, Grae or Robert, send them along to us in an email or letter and we'll forward them on.*