

Musical Bridges, Inc.

Beth Merrill, Administrative Director

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Musical Bridges, Inc. is the only cultural exchange organization devoted to helping the remote Siberian capital city of Chita and Chita Region join the world community. Closed during the Soviet era, this region has been hobbled throughout its history by geographical, political and economic isolation.

Recognizing the power of person to person contact for positive change, Musical Bridges focuses on educational, social and business support and the arts. Education projects include sending English teachers, promoting relationships between American and Chita institutions, assisting in student and teacher exchange and providing teaching materials. It promotes exchanges in the performing and visual arts. It also assists in access to resources and developing contacts.

By encouraging Chita-initiated projects, matching them with American resources and following them through to completion, Musical Bridges builds lasting bonds of successful cooperation and mutual benefit through which understanding and friendship can grow.

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you'd like to see

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- ***[Messages from our 2000 - 2001 teachers in Chita](#)***
- ***[Become a Member of Musical Bridges and help us continue this crucial work.](#)***
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Donate online at www.musicalbridges.org!

Meet Beth Merrill, our new Administrative Director

It is with great enthusiasm and pride that I take on my new responsibilities with Musical Bridges. After volunteering with education and human service organizations both internationally and locally, it is exciting to coordinate programs similar to those that I've participated in as a volunteer. My experience teaching first grade to 40 Nicaraguan school-children gives me an idea how our new teachers in the Chita Region are feeling right now!



Chita Region is particularly compelling. The challenges it faces are enormous as it struggles to become part of the world community. Its dire economic situation (see box) is cause for concern, even here in America; world stability is not possible without stability in Russia. Some citizens fear their isolation

- **Chita is one of Russia's poorest Regions, ranking 88th out of 89 regions economically.**
- **75% of citizens live below the poverty line.**
- **Due to its long border with China and its role as seat to the U.S.S.R.'s largest military district, Chita Region was closed to the outside world during the Soviet era. In the past year, this district has doubled in size, reaching from west of Lake Baikal all the way to the Russian Far East.**

According to Russian Federation statistics

may return—even Chita Region becoming closed again—if the community doesn't attain its own socio-economic sustainability.

Many increasingly recognize that a major part of the solution lies in connections and cooperation with the rest of the



Our first container to Chita was finally distributed this summer, and here is the computer lab at the Technical University constructed out of the computers we sent! Books went to over 13 institutions and libraries, both member institutions of the Chita Higher Education Consortium and its friends, and our second container is due to be sent this month.

world, and right now we are broadening our efforts to help it achieve this—helping Chita help itself. Musical Bridge's role is not to decide what's best for the Region, but to encourage and facilitate connections to the people and organizations that will help them toward a stable and sustainable future.

Your support of Musical Bridges helps create this future. Whether supporting the native English speakers we send to four different institutions in the Region, or sending a shipment of books to be distributed by the Chita Higher Education Consortium among schools and libraries Region-wide, or installing the computers which enable communication with the rest of the world, your dollars directly assist real people with a real need to connect. With Musical Bridges' planned expansion of services for 2001-2002, your support now is more critical than ever before.

Musical Bridges sent four teachers to Chita Region this year.

Two are in the city of Chita:

Robert Romano of Pinckney, Michigan
returns for a 2nd year at Zabaikalsky State Pedagogical University

Daniel Kirwan of El Paso, Texas
is teaching at Chita State Technical University

*Two are in Aginsk Buryat Autonomous District
(The District wholly contained within the borders of Chita Region,
and lies about 120 km south of the city of Chita):*

Whitney Lawton of Lee, New Hampshire
is teaching in Uzon

David Balan of Olathe, Kansas
is teaching in Alkhanai

Click on a name to go to that teacher's message.

Well, here I am in Chita for another year. People think I'm crazy for wanting to stay, but I can't help it--I like it here. Now everything is easier. I've settled in, and daily living is more normal, not the adventure it was last year.

In my first year of teaching, it was a real challenge to get students to express themselves. This year, all that has changed. Having brought additional teaching materials from the U.S., I came more prepared. My classes are tighter, more material is covered, and with a year's experience, I have a better idea of the exercises they need.

People in Chita are beginning to understand--only *they* will improve their situation, it *can* be done, and Musical Bridges is here to help.

Seniors are now away for two months for teaching internships, so I started with only students I had never taught; they had no expectations as to how challenging my classes would be. Everyone is included in the discussions and exercises, and students quickly learned they'd better come prepared. If students are tardy, I make them stand in front of the class and explain --in English--why they are late. Nothing like a little embarrassment to motivate a student in the right direction! Those seniors are in for a surprise when they return!

Tom [Musical Bridges Chairman] received an impressive reception when he arrived in September. He was constantly meeting with various business, developmental and educational leaders, and I think

finally the message is starting to get through. Musical Bridges can't be Santa Claus to the people of Chita (Tom's favorite phrase), but rather can be a partner by helping to actualize projects, and serving as a conduit for connections in the United States, cultural exchange in its broadest and best sense. People are beginning to understand--only *they* will improve their situation, it *can* be done, and Musical Bridges is here to help.

Finally, a request to readers of this newsletter (especially my family and friends!): please don't skip by the page about donating to Musical Bridges. Our greatest obstacle in providing services to Chita is money, and every little bit helps. Remember, I'm here washing and reusing ziploc bags and living five days in a row without hot water because I like what I do *and know it helps the people I'm working with*. And I've got it easy compared to Whitney and David down in Uzon and Alkhanai. It is embarrassing to remember some of the frivolous things I used to spend my money on, while Musical Bridges struggles with financial limitations. Consider what a dollar means to you, and then what that same dollar would mean if it could help this region. O.K., I'm off my soapbox; enjoy the rest of the newsletter!



Chita, October 2000

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[Click to go to Daniel Kirwan](#)



Daniel Kirwan is at Chita State Technical University in Chita

On first arrival I was struck by the number five. A short walk from the Chinese Market, five granite columns comprise the War Memorial--1941, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945--each column citing the matériel freely given by the people of Chita. On the periphery, marble slabs list the names of Chita's soldiers who lost their lives in "The Great Patriotic War." Soviet-era five-storey apartments dot the landscape, the grey buildings matching the expressionless faces passing by.

But step inside an apartment, and it is another world. The brightly lit interiors are colorful, a large tapestry-like carpet hangs on the wall, and bookcases are full of novels, poetry and photographs of relatives. Most impressive are my hosts. As a West Texan, I'm no stranger to hospitality, yet I'm hard-pressed to think of anyone who can do it better. After several courses of food and libations, the evening is drawn to a close with a few songs. As a guest, you're required to sing one yourself!

On the street, I'm often asked, "Ot kuda vuy?"--"Where are you from?" When they hear "America," they always walk away with a smile. Interestingly enough, Lenin's statue hasn't been torn down yet. It's unsettling for this former NATO troop to see all the uniforms: Army and Special Forces, Navy, Marines and two different kinds of police. Chita is part of "the Red Belt," and this is the seat of Russia's largest military district.

My students are angels. (Again, five: it's a five year program.) My 2nd year students are surprisingly fluent in English; their older colleagues are downright sophisticated. I hope, with their superb preparation, they can see value in the help of this native English speaker!

Russia in general and Chita in particular seem to be "down for the count" in terms of poverty during this transition. I'm a true cynic, but I find myself saying everything is going to turn out all right. And I'm sure it will be so.

Whitney Lawton is teaching in Uzon, Aginsk Buryat Autonomous District

What first comes to mind when I think of Uzon? Cows. They are everywhere and it is your job to get out of their way. My very first impression of Uzon is driving down the street dodging cows. My second is the incredibly warm welcome I received. The people here are ethnically Buryat, which is very close to Mongolian, and I think they invented the term hospitality.

Uzon is a village of about 1000, the remnants of an old Soviet communal farm. Four main streets run through town, Oktoberskaya, New, Main and Peace; the rest are dirt paths. Only a few people own cars, but a car isn't necessary, anyway, since the town is small enough to walk anywhere you need to go. All water is carried from a communal cistern that is filled from the nearby river. We do, however, have electricity and a few people have phones--so you can see, Uzon is really quite civilized! The mountains are close by so there are plenty of opportunities for hiking and other outdoor activities.

I teach at Uzon's school and have students ages 10-16. Many of the children and I play baseball every Sunday. The weather is conspiring against us however, as temperatures are already falling. Today, we had our first snowfall, and it's only the beginning of October. It doesn't bother me though; I love it here!





David Balan is teaching in Alkhanai, also in the Aginsk District

A village of about 1,200 people, Alkhanai is surrounded by rolling hills, beautiful birch forests and a wildlife population the likes of Alaska. Here in Alkhanai we heat with wood, get our water from a well, tend to our livestock, and think mostly about our friends and family. While the students here need a lot of practice with their English, I am more than willing to assist and couldn't be happier to be here.



David and his hostess, Dulma Gombozhapova, inside his Alkhanai home



The *domik* where David lives.
His host family stands in their doorway with friends.

[Click to return to Main Teacher page](#)

By becoming a member of Musical Bridges you help ensure the continued success of our programs.

Membership entitles you to:

- *Recognition in our twice-yearly mailings*
- *Our new “Natural Beauty of Chita Region” 2001 full-color calendar -- photos by Chita photographers*
- *Our bumper sticker: “Do you know where Chita is? I do!”*
- *Periodic e-mail updates on Musical Bridges activities*

Other ways to contribute:

- Donate stock to Musical Bridges
- Include Musical Bridges in your will
- Make Musical Bridges an irrevocable beneficiary of your insurance policy
- Name Musical Bridges as beneficiary of your retirement plan
- Contributions may also be wired directly to Musical Bridges' bank account

For information about these or other creative approaches to supporting Musical Bridges, please check the box on the donation envelope and we will contact you.

What do the dollars provide?

- \$8000 pays for shipping of a 20 foot container of donated educational material to Chita.
- \$5000 covers the travel, stipend and insurance of an English teacher for a year.
- \$100 purchases one used computer and monitor for a Chita educational institution.
- \$15 covers the cost of shipping and handling of one box of books or computer parts in the 20 foot container.

Where does your donation go?

- 64% Teachers, Container, MB development in Chita
 - 5% Semi-annual mailings
 - 21% Salary (\$9600)
 - 10% Supplies, accounting, office, telephone, etc.
- (based on year 2000 figures)

Please give generously!

Remember, you can use your credit card by going to www.musicalbridges.org and clicking “Donate Online”

Membership and contribution form

Please print and mail to Musical Bridges

Please choose your membership

Annual Membership	\$75.00	_____
Two-year Membership (33% discount)	\$125.00	_____
Contributing Membership	\$150.00	_____
Sustaining Membership	\$250.00	_____
	Membership subtotal	_____

Additional contribution

I pledge \$ _____

Pledge installment enclosed _____

GRAND TOTAL _____

*Access, opportunity
and good neighbors
through cultural
exchange*

*For the formerly
closed Siberian city
of Chita
and Chita Region.*

Make checks payable to *Musical Bridges, Inc.*, insert in this envelope, seal and send to:

Musical Bridges, Inc

604 Rood Pond Rd.

Williamstown, VT 05679

If you prefer to pay by credit card, go to our website, www.musicalbridges.org.

Just click "Donate Online" and follow the prompts.

Please complete the following:

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Telephone and email: _____

Check if change of address

I'd like to discuss other types of giving (stocks, wills, wiring, etc.) Please contact me.

I'd like to spread the word about memberships, send me additional newsletters.

Musical Bridges, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation and all contributions to it are tax-deductible. The value of any gift received must be deducted from the contribution.

Images from Chita



One of the pictures from the new full-color "Natural Beauty of Chita Region" 2001 calendar (free with membership.) photo: A. Lesnansky

Zabaikalsky Center for Social Development Directors, Svetlana Bagina and Konstantin Shlyamov. ZCSD is unique in Chita, providing consulting and services to over 140 local health, child welfare, business support and other non-government organizations--helping Chita help itself.



"The outside world used to view Zabaikalye as a place destitute of civilization. We were an obscure region, never in the mainstream of the events of the 20th century. Today we have opened up to the world--owing to Musical Bridges... Thank you for your big heart, empathy and love for our land."

A. V. Doshlov, President, on behalf of Chita Television and Radio Network Staff



The Chita Higher Education Consortium meeting, September 29, 2000. Back row: Andrei, Ped. Univ. teacher, Vitya, Tech. Univ. student and Robert Romano, MB teacher. Second standing row: Svetlana Sivtsova and Dalzhin, Technical Univ., Julia Bakhmutova, Pushkin Library, Lyudmila Tatarnikova, Pedagogical Univ., Dan Kirwan, MB teacher, Tatiana Suturina (Leader), Technical Univ., Tatiana Sukhanova, Pedagogical Univ., Tom Dickinson, MB Chairman. Seated: Svetlana Novolodskaya, Entrepreneurship Inst., Medical Academy and Refresher College representatives, Natalya Gotlib, Modern Humanities Univ., Oleg Kuznetsov, Technical Univ., Olga Fleshtler, Modern Humanities Univ.

A visit to the new Buddhist temple at Uzon. Construction was funded entirely with donations by local residents.



THANKS TO OUR MEMBERS

Robert & Marie Anderson
Elisha & Elizabeth Atkins
Nancy Barrer
Barbara B. Burn
Doris Cotton
Donald & Charlotte Currier
Anne Dickinson
Charles & Jean Dickinson
Joe Dickinson
Thomas Dickinson
Franklin & Laura Garrish
David & Helen Gehrenbeck
Richard & Dixie Grossman
Tara Harter
Betsy & Kenneth Jacobson
Chris & Gloria Krahn
Annie McNeill-Garibay
Rex & Margaret O'Neal
Ruth B. Perkins
Nancy Pfund
Gladys McNeill Stout
Mr. & Mrs. Arthur Sweeton
Heidi Syropoulos
Marion Wagner
Sue Wilcox

AND ALL THE REST OF OUR CONTRIBUTORS!

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Contribute using a credit card online!

Exhibition by five Chita photographers

Info on Chita organizations

Chairman Tom Dickinson's fall visit to Chita



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