

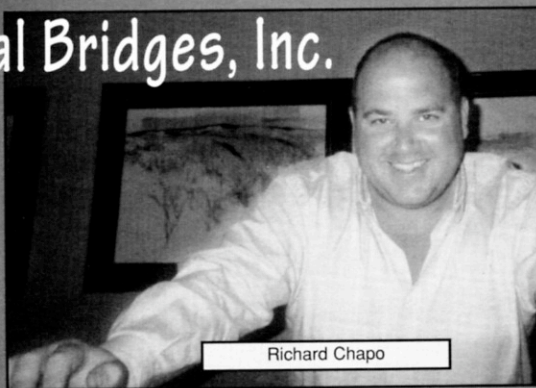


# *Spring 1999 Newsletter*

Musical Bridges, Inc.

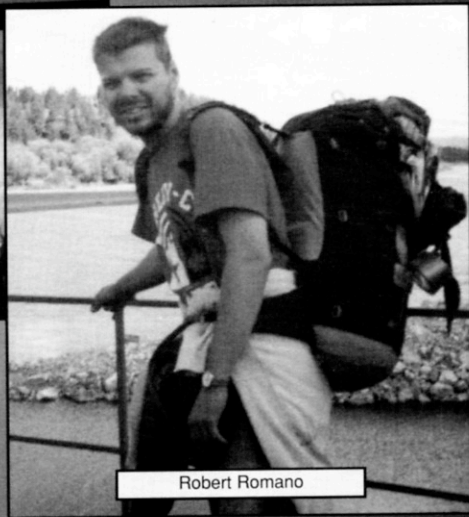


Grae Waters



Richard Chapo

*Our 1999-2000 Musical Bridges  
teachers for Chita*



Robert Romano

*Access, opportunity and good neighbors through cultural exchange*



# Musical Bridges, Inc.

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## Newsletter -- Spring 1999

### President's Message

Short and sweet--so we can list our favorite people: our thoughtful and generous contributors!

The 1998-99 teachers in Chita, **Stephen Houtsma** and **Michael Matthews** come home in just a couple of weeks. Many thanks for their work and unflagging good spirits!

We are pleased to announce the teachers for next year: **Robert Romano** of Ypsilanti, Michigan, **Richard Chapo** of San Diego, California and **Grae Waters** of Somerset, Kentucky! Robert will take Stephen's place at the Pedagogical University and Pedagogical College, and Richard will replace Michael at the Technical University while taking on responsibilities at "School #49," Chita-city's English magnet school. Grae will teach at our first program expansion site outside the city of Chita (the first of many we hope!), in Aginsk Buryat Autonomous District. This District, contained entirely within Chita Region's borders, holds the Region's main population of its largest minority, the Buryats, who are ethnically Mongolian and Russia's only native Buddhist population.

Though delayed, two favorite projects are still going strong. We now have enough books and computers to fill a 20 foot container, and a better understanding of Russian customs laws to make the transport to Chita smooth and uneventful. It will be sent in August so it can be distributed by our teachers in Chita in early autumn. And you have another chance to attend the André Watts fund-raiser concert in Connecticut which was postponed to September due to Mr. Watts' illness.

With all the unrest and misunderstanding so evident in the news today, we are proud of the work that our teachers, our donors and our colleagues in Chita are doing to build good neighbor relations. Our grassroots diplomacy is changing this small corner of Russia and all the small corners of America touched by this work--and isn't the whole world simply composed of small corners just like these? Real, concrete progress is being made toward a saner, happier place, one project and one person at a time. **Join us!**

*Morgan J. Dickinson*  
President

## THANKS to Our Contributors! November 1997 - May 1999

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continued next column





# And THANKS to Our Book and Computer Donors for the Shipment to Chita!

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 Marcia Aubineau, St. Paul, Minnesota  
 Nancy Barrer, Westport, Connecticut  
 Victoria Bashenow, Guilford, Connecticut

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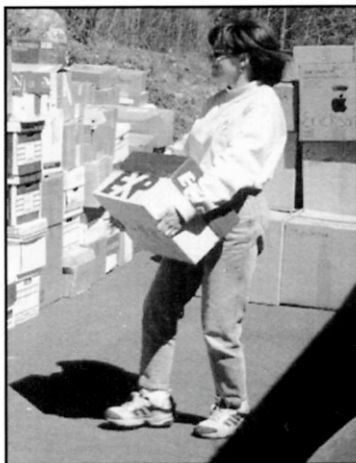


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1998-99 National Honor Society, Molly Hueller,  
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Workin' The Books At The Storage Space In Clinton, CT

Top: MB President Thomas Dickinson. Middle: Volunteers from Urban Solutions, New Haven, CT: Rosa Rivera, Program Director Andrea Campbell, and Joy Harris (not shown: Derek Teel and Angel Vasquez). Bottom: MB Board Member, Ginger Jones.

## An American in Chita

excerpted from Stephen Houtsma's article for "The Trans-Baikal Regional News"

In the last newsletter we heard from Michael Matthews, Musical Bridges' teacher at the Technical University. This time we hear from Stephen who teaches at the Pedagogical University and the Pedagogical College. Stephen's article appeared in this local paper on January 27, 1999. He translated this excerpt into English for its appearance here.

Since arriving in Chita from the United States at the beginning of October, my life has been radically altered from its previous familiar course. I had visited European Russia two times previously in 1992 and 1993. I had also been intensely studying the language and culture of Russia for the past five years. Thus my sense of "culture shock" was not as acute as it otherwise may have been. But this was my first time in Siberia, and first time on the continent of Asia.

### Getting Oriented

My first week was spent orienting myself to the central district of the city. Many of the basic questions of everyday life had to be answered--the names of the surrounding streets, where to buy food and other basic necessities, which trolleybuses went where, how would I be able to communicate with my wife and family, etc. My first few weeks were also spent photographing my new world, both the splendid architecture of the city center and my new Russian friends and colleagues. Having access to electronic mail has been a real blessing. Instead of the month required to send an ordinary letter, my wife and I can communicate almost instantaneously through our computers. Who would have dreamed such technology would be available to us even 10 or 15 years ago?

### Made To Feel Welcome

Many people have been instrumental in helping me to adapt to my new world. Particularly kind has been Tatiana Sukhanova, head of the English Department of the Pedagogical University where I am teaching. Whenever any questions or problems arise, Tatiana has always graciously taken the time to assist me, and not only with affairs connected to my teaching post, but in matters of everyday life as well. Lyudmila Ostanina, an instructor of English and Economics of the Technical University, accompanied me here from New York, and her assistance both during the trip and afterwards has also proved invaluable. Had Lyuda not been with me in Moscow, I would probably still be wandering around Domodyedovo Airport in Moscow trying to find out which airplane was on its way to Chita! Evgenia Myasnikova, Head of English at the Pedagogical College where I also teach, on several occasions provided me with wonderful vegetables, jam and potatoes which she grew at her country dacha. Many other individuals--teaching col-



leagues, students and other new friends and acquaintances--have also been invaluable sources of friendship and help these last three months; their names would fill up the pages of this newspaper! I know that the friendships I've formed here will continue on long after my return to the U.S.

## Teaching

My students' level of English is truly very high, and whatever fears I may have had that we may not be able to understand each other quickly vanished after my first encounters with them. We discuss various topics on American life including music, film, money, education, health care, crime and geography. I frequently give small writing assignments, asking the students for opinions on questions concerning both Russian and American life. Reading their essays is as much of an education for me as the writing is for them!

## Nature in Zabaikalye

Nature in the Zabaikalye is strikingly beautiful, and in many respects reminds me of my home state of Colorado. Although we don't have birch trees, the mountains in Colorado are filled with pines, evergreens, aspens and poplars. So far I have had two opportunities to see the countryside, although I am sure there will be many more. In October, four other teachers and I took a bus outside the city, and then walked to the Molokovka mineral



Stephen Houtsma at the railroad station in Chita

springs. We had a picnic on the mountain, drank the waters, warmed ourselves afterwards with a campfire, and had a wonderful time in the crisp, clean air. In November, I accompanied four students to Lake Arakhlei, where we ate shashlik together, and I experienced my first Russian banya. Very few people were staying by the lake at the time, and the quiet and peacefulness of the area was inspiring. Standing on the frozen lake at 2 o'clock in the morning I saw a clear, star filled sky such as I had never seen before.

## Popular Culture

In my apartment the University has provided me with both a television and a radio. Russian broadcasts are fascinating whether they be news programs, films, quiz

shows, or even cartoons. They have been an invaluable aid both for improving my language skills and for learning about Russian culture and way of life. It's exciting now to be able to identify the famous Russian stars and films. "The Diamond Arm," "Ivan Basielich Changes His Profession," and "Lady With A Dog," great Russian films that are rarely seen in the U.S., have become personal favorites. I've also become better acquainted with Russian pop music and especially enjoy Mymi Troll, Murat Nosirov and DDT. One of my students recently lent me a cassette of Vladimir Visotsky's songs, and I really loved them. He is a true Russian bard.

Already, in my brief stay here, I have accumulated memories that will last a lifetime. I truly hope that my association with the wonderful citizens of Chita and the Zabaikalye region will continue on in some capacity after my departure. Perhaps business will draw me back in years to come. It is always difficult to predict the future, but certainly the talent, experience and high educational level of the people here could provide for fruitful economic cooperation with the United States and Canada, if the right opportunities were to present themselves. In any event, I know I'll be busy writing letters to my dear friends in Chita!

Stephen Houtsma

*Musical Bridges is the only U.S. charitable organization devoted to Chita, so every dollar contributed has a significant impact on Chita English education and on increased understanding and contact between Americans and this important part of Russia.*

*The more you give, the greater the impact:*

*If you give \$8000, a 20 foot container of donated educational materials can be shipped to Chita.*

*Give \$5000, and we can send an English teacher for a year.*

*\$1000 provides the stipend for one English teacher. (Note: the teachers work and live just as local teachers do, and are paid a local salary--typically only \$50 per month .)*

*\$750 pays for the medical and emergency evacuation insurance for that English teacher.*

*If you give \$100, we can purchase 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.*

***Please give generously!***