

# Siberian Bridges'

## FALL NEWSLETTER 2014

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### **TWO NOVEMBER EVENTS COMING UP SOON!**

1. **Thursday, Nov. 13th is Give to the Max Day in Minnesota!** Please go to <https://givemn.org/organization/Siberianbridges> and contribute as you can. A \$500 match has been offered by Friends of Siberian Bridges.
2. **Come on Sunday, Nov 23rd to our annual fundraising event**, a one-hour concert-presentation at Linden Hills United Church of Christ, 4200 Upton Ave S in Minneapolis. Our President, Tom Dickinson, will perform selections from his 25th Anniversary Concert in Chita this summer and speak about his two-month stay. Special guests from Chita, Olga Fleshler and Elena Pischerskaya, will attend and, we hope, say a few words. Refreshments follow. Admission is free.



# Siberian Bridges

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To fellow friends of Siberian Bridges:

Siberian Bridges (SB) started its activities in 1993 when Russia was struggling to survive the hard post-Soviet times and was opening up to the world. It was with the immediate assistance of SB that English language instruction in Chita universities and rural schools was completely transformed and vitalized – its teachers did their best to fill in the gap the Cold War had left behind: a lot of people came to understand firsthand that we can be good neighbors rather than enemies and that the English language is a very powerful tool to this effect.

2014 was special in many ways: Tom Dickinson, the founder and President of Siberian Bridges, came to Chita with a group of tourists on its “Taste of Zabaikalye” trip. His concert at Chita's Philharmonia Hall marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his first visit to Chita and it turned out that the memory of Tom's first concert in August 1989 is still cherished by a lot of people here. I happened to interpret for Tom on his first visit and I can see only too clear that these twenty plus years have brought about a lot of permanent changes for the better in the lives of so many people here through SB devoted work.

This summer was the time for summing up and planning new lines of work. And we—Siberian Bridges-Russia and Siberian Bridges-US, together—are really moving ahead with the projects like at a Children's Home in a remote town of our region or supplying a village school with books and teaching materials or developing a new project aimed at restoring monuments to the Decembrists. They were nobles who rebelled against the oppressive tsarist regime of serfdom in the 19th century, though they failed in their reform efforts. Keeping the memory of the Decembrists alive is vitally important as they set the example of integrity, morality and devotion, something which is in very short supply in Russia now.

The work of Siberian Bridges nowadays is of extra importance – we are witnesses to the most outrageous efforts of politicians on both sides to drive Russia and America apart and to take us back to the time of mistrust and hostility. Grassroot level efforts like these are very important as they show that human links and neighborly relations are much stronger than politicians' momentary interests and that they persist no matter what. And we know it for sure as a lot of people this past summer came to confirm it when saying “Thank you” to Tom or sharing new ideas for future projects with him. Siberian Bridges ongoing activity is what we really need and I urge you to support it.

Sincerely,

Tatiana Sukhanova, Chita, Russia  
Founding Member, Siberian Bridges-Russia (Сибирские Мосты)

*Siberian Bridges is a 501c3 non-profit corporation. All donations are tax-deductible*

## UPDATE – NOVEMBER 2014

- **Come to our fall fundraiser, Sunday, November 23rd at 3:00 P.M.**, a one-hour concert/presentation at the Linden Hills United Church of Christ in Minneapolis. It will include selections from Tom Dickinson's 25th anniversary Chita concert and tales of his two-month stay. Special guests will be Olga Fleshler and Elena Pischerskaya of Siberian Bridges Russia, all the way from Chita, who will be in the U.S. for an academic conference.
- The long-awaited **2014 Taste of Zabaikalye tour** was a resounding success, setting a precedent for more Americans coming to see this place. A 2016 followup is planned, this time to explore the gorgeous Krasny Chikoi region along with the capital city of Chita. Its draws are the fascinating "Old Believer" communities, the extensive



A day on the lake, 2014 tour group are guests of **Slava Vyunov, local poet**, and his wife. From left: Steve Margolin (Oroville, CA), Tom Dickinson, Slava and Natasha Vyunov, Robin Hoffman (Providence, RI), Renee Margolin, Meg Mabbs (Knoxville), Irene Duranczyk, Olga Kostina (Tour Organizer), Olga Fleshler archeological dig that explores 40,000 year old communities which are likely the source of the native populations of the Americas, and the Buryat culture of western Zabaikalye. An add-on to Lake Baikal will be available. Read about and view images of the 2014 tour at our website, and come along in 2016!

- Following the tour, **Tom made his first visit to the Children's Home/School** in Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky. He observed as SB's scholarship grant was



The scholarship winners taking a bow at the Children's Home.

distributed among 25 students for exemplary grades and behavior in a moving ceremony. The remainder was used for the entry fee to a province-wide soccer tournament, allowing their team to join it for the first time.

- Tom met **Natalya Petrenko of the village of Zasopka**, near Chita. She showed him the school where she teaches English to all 392 students in its eleven grades, and the books we donated to it. It was in the midst of its annual bout of repair. He learned the shocking news that the handful of books we had sent were shared among *33 more* such village schools. He also saw that this school had exactly two teaching computers and Ms Petrenko was still limited to flashcards and ancient cassette



Natalya Petrenko in the Zasopka School with the small collection (including a complete World Book Encyclopedia) contributed by Siberian Bridges.

tapes for English instruction. So we are looking for donations of earliest reading level children's books for these 34 schools, and we will now collect used laptops for the Zasopka school.

- After spending a morning teaching English at a **language day camp in the small Buryat city of Aginskoye**, Tom was asked if SB could send a teacher to stay the entire 3 weeks next June. **U of M grad student, Jennifer Drewyor** has signed up on Irene Duranczyk's recommendation. She'll arrive early and/or stay longer for thesis research on



Residential area of Aginskoye

pedagogy and possible interaction in Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky with the Children's Home.

- Our long relationship with **the Pushkin Library** reached an historical moment when Siberian Bridges was asked for specific academic texts in English. These will replace outdated academic texts in fields not fully developed in post-Soviet Russia. Textbooks on Agronomy and Psychology top the list. At the same time the Library asked what it could do for us. A wonderful plan for a **trans-global interpretive film series** was thought up. A beloved Russian film will be screened in Minneapolis, interpreted for cultural understanding by local Russian emigrés, and a similarly beloved and characteristic American film would be screened at the Pushkin Library next May with Tom providing a cultural perspective. (He is accepting suggestions for which American films to screen!)



Prof. Aleksandr Konstantinov gave an overview of Zabaikalyan history to the 2014 tourists at the Pushkin Library.

## PETROVSK ZABAIKALSKY CHILDREN'S HOME/SCHOOL

There is exciting news from the Children's Home/School #1! Tanya Kolodeznikova, Zoya Chizkova, and Nastya Prostakishina, along with their music teacher Ekaterina Fyodorova, recently flew to Moscow to represent their town at the fourth National Assembly Festival [of state homes] entitled "We Are the Future of Russia." The participants were children from orphanages, boarding schools, and shelters from across the nation.

The Moscow State Institute of Foreign Relations hosted the event. Its stated goals were to draw



Kids from the Children's Home attend a recital the Petrovsk-Zabaikalsky Arts Center by Tom Dickinson. Tanya Kolodeznikova and Zoya Chizkova are front row, 1st and 3rd from the left.

attention to the problems of orphans and promote two intertwined objectives: raising happy children to be assets to society, and supporting children who have fallen into complicated life situations.

But most of all it was a showcase for the remarkable talents of the orphans. An article covering the event said:



Tanya Kolodeznikova performing in Moscow

"The most memorable performance came from Tanya Kolodeznikova ("kuh-luh-dez-NEE-kuh-vuh") from the Zabaikalsky Krai. Tanya not only gave a moving performance of a song about Russia in folk style, but also at the end addressed the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, with a plea to stop the closure of the Children's Home-School where Tanya lives and studies."

Tanya's plea responds to a proposal to close the school part of the Children's Home/School and send the children to local public schools while dispersing the teaching team to other

institutions. This would be a huge blow to the director Natalya Skliarova and her staff whose hard work and comprehensive plans to develop in these children self-esteem and a sense of self-worth alongside a good education, are now in jeopardy. The future is not clear, and this one girl's courage reflects the deep concern both children and staff have for that future.

You can watch her performance, and that of little Zoya, the Home's musical wonder child, at its website, <http://pzabdetdom.ucoz.ru/> Three videos listed: Zoya's is second, Tanya's is third. (Note: Opening Tanya's video will get you a black page and instructions in Russian to watch it on Youtube. Clicking the Russian in the top left corner of the box should play the video.)

## Meet Irene Duranczyk

### *Building a new sister university relationship*

A couple of years after moving to Minneapolis in 2002, Irene Duranczyk meandered across the street and met her new neighbor Tom Dickinson, President of Siberian Bridges. Irene's interest in gardening, classical music, peace activism and neighborhood ties resonated with Tom and conversations about Siberian Bridges ensued. Since then, Irene and her partner Tom Lonergan have been active contributors and attendees at Siberian Bridges concerts and other events.



*Irene on Slava Vyunov's WWII U.S. "Lend-Lease" jeep (it still runs!) during 2014 tour.*

Irene is an Associate Professor at the University of Minnesota, invited there because of her work in ethnomathematics and multicultural pedagogy. In 2013 she was honored with the Multicultural Recognition Award by the College of Education. She chaired the University Senate's Equity, Access and Diversity (EAD) Committee from 2009-2013. Her work explores multicultural approaches to teaching and learning, and to internationalizing curriculum.

She has presented her research in Antalya, Turkey; Rzeszow, Poland; and Galway, Ireland. And on October 16th, Irene was delighted to add Chita, Russia to that list when she joined, this time via video-stream, the "Conference on Human Values in the 21st Century" run by the Humanities and Pedagogy Departments of Zabaikalsky State University ("ZabGU").

Her participation arose out of initial university-to-university meetings made this summer at ZabGU when she was in Russia as tourist on the Taste of Zabaikalye tour. Irene is looking forward to a lively exchange of students and faculty between the two universities over the next several years. As Irene stated in her October presentation, "I invite you to Minnesota, in person or by video-conference, to share your work and research. Through such sharing, together we can achieve more global harmony, despite political roadblocks our governments may erect. May your conference enrich your professional development and guide us towards peace and justice."



## Contribution Form

### **By check:**

Return this panel filled out with your check payable to "Siberian Bridges" to:

Siberian Bridges  
3212 18th Ave S  
Minneapolis, MN 55407

### **By credit card or Paypal:**

Go online to [www.siberianbridges.org](http://www.siberianbridges.org) and click on the "Donate" button.

*Siberian Bridges is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. All donations are 100% tax-deductible.*

### **\$500 match for Nov-Dec donations offered by "A Longtime Fan"**

*Earmark your donation for (optional):  
Bi-monthly Children's Home box (\$82)  
Children's Home box contents (\$25)  
Monthly Book shipment (\$82)  
Special book purchases for the Pushkin Library*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Contribution amount

## Siberian Bridges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century!

- **We encourage you to switch to email.** Paper mailings amount to about 90 cents each including printing and postage, and postage costs keep rising. These mailings end up being the largest single item on our shoestring budget. If you would prefer to be contacted by email and receive our newsletters (*in color!*) as email attachments printable at home, please let us know.
- **The website has a lot of new material:** tales from 2014 Taste of Zabaikalye tour, stories from Tom's extended stay in Chita, reports on the developing university relationship, etc. [www.siberianbridges.org](http://www.siberianbridges.org)
- **SB on youtube.** Search "Siberian Bridges in Zabaikalye" at [youtube.com](http://youtube.com) or find the link at our website, to view our own channel of videos, from the newest promotional video, to videos of children at the Children's Home.
- Please note that our only email address is:  
**[siberianbridges@gmail.com](mailto:siberianbridges@gmail.com)**



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*A 501c3 non-profit corporation registered in the State of Minnesota*

**In heavy coats the old men walk,  
Tapping loudly with their hefty walking sticks  
And downward they gaze  
As if to check on the durability of the land  
And their own affairs.**

**And nearby romp some children fleet of foot,  
Into the sky they peer  
Pushing each other, laughing, and shouting,  
Thinking that life is solid as a rock.**

**Both the old men nonetheless tap with their canes,  
And seriously have their doubts.  
And they hold their tongues.**

*Poem by Slava Vyunov  
Translation by Chuck Ritchie*

*Vyacheslav (Slava) Vyunov is a retired forest ranger living on Lake Ivan, an hour's drive from Chita*



*Tea at Slava and Natasha Vyunov's, a highlight of the 2014 Taste of Zabaikalye Tour. Slava and Natasha are standing on the right.*