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*Contact and cooperation...toward mutual understanding and respect*

February 20, 2024

Dear friends of Siberian Bridges!

As friends of and those interested in Siberian Bridges, you are aware our organization has weathered a difficult moment that began with the start of the Russian military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. Since then, the board has been rebuilt, and we hope we can continue to implement our mission of "Contact and cooperation between the Trans-Baikal region and the Upper Midwest for the purposes of mutual understanding and respect." This short newsletter introduces that board.

The newsletter also includes, for your information, a statement that had been devised to make clear the direction of Siberian Bridges for recruiting the current board members. It was then revised a bit to try to find, for the first time, Russians from the Trans-Baikal region to be ex-officio board members who, while not officially part of the organization, would help devise projects of mutual interest.

The next newsletter will appear in the fall and we hope there will be much of interest to report!

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Dickinson", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tom Dickinson  
President and Founder

## OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

TIM PEARSON is our new Chairman. Bio from Tim: I was born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a graduate of Roosevelt High School. I was attracted to team sports at a young age and that has continued into adulthood. I am a Personal Trainer and work with a variety of people to encourage active and healthy lifestyles. Throughout my childhood, I made friends with people who had a passion for sports and athletics and through this channel I was lucky enough to meet people from all walks of life. In college, I met my wife Sandra. She is from Ecuador. Her family is a blast, they love to joke, dance and have a good time. I have travelled to Ecuador many times and it's a great place. Sandra and I fell in love during our undergraduate years. We both attended the University of Minnesota-Morris. I earned my BA in Sports Management and she double-majored in Studio Art and Economics. After working for over a decade at the YWCA of Minneapolis we moved to Massachusetts, so Sandra could earn her MS in Applied Mathematics at the University of Massachusetts. (She completed her PhD in Biostatistics at the University of Minnesota in 2022). The YWCA was an amazing start for my career. I trained people of all ages and backgrounds, from young kids, the disabled, through senior citizens. I wore many hats at the YWCA: Olympic Lifting Coach, Boot Camp Instructor (I didn't yell!), Group Fitness Instructor, Endurance Sports Coach, among others. Now, I run my own business. I train people one-on-one, with partners, and in large groups. The groups provide support and encouragement and can push people beyond what they think they can accomplish. Being a small business owner has challenges, but it allows me to have more flexibility for our growing family. We have two children. Wyatt is 11-years-old and Victoria is 6-months-



*The Castro-Pearson family. From left: Victoria, Sandra, Wyatt, Tim*

old. We have a cat, Lulu, and two dogs, Charlie and Pepa. Health and fitness is my passion, and along this journey I met Tom Dickinson who over the years talked with me about Siberian Bridges. Now, I am part of Siberian Bridges. I love to travel and one of these years I will visit Russia with Tom.

COLEEN ROWLEY is our new Secretary. Coleen Rowley is a retired FBI Special Agent and former Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel who taught Constitutional Law and law enforcement ethics to FBI agents and other law enforcement, then became a whistleblower about the FBI's pre 9-11 failures, testifying to the Joint Intelligence Committee Inquiry, the Senate Judiciary Committee and the Inspector General Staff of the Department of Justice. She was named, along with two other corporate whistleblowers, as TIME Magazine's 2002 Persons



*Some of the Rowley family. From left, son Jeb, daughter Bette, Coleen, Jeb's wife Carly, Coleen's husband Ross*

of the Year. In early March 2003 she warned FBI Director Robert Mueller of further problems, including his going along with the Bush Administration's deceptive plan to launch war on what would become the counterproductive war on Iraq, a country that had nothing to do with the 9-11 attacks. Since retiring from the FBI, Rowley continues to write and speak out about the "global war on terror" that has increased terrorism worldwide and made the situation far worse.

JOE HUEBSCH is our new Treasurer. Bio from Joe: Greetings! I was born in Saint Paul, Minnesota in 1966. I have two older brothers and a younger sister. I grew up in a small suburb of Saint Paul called Falcon Heights. I learned to skate and play hockey at a very young age. The story goes that I was skating before I could speak and that when my parents would take me off the ice I would cry. I played hockey through college, where we had an opportunity to play in Europe for about 3 weeks. That is where my love of travel and experiencing different cultures began. I still enjoy traveling and meeting new people whenever I can. I am looking forward to traveling to Russia in the near future where I hope to make new friends and share in meaningful experiences. When I'm not traveling, I live in Golden Valley, Minnesota with my wife, Katy, and an English bulldog

named Baxter. My wife and I have two adult children who are in college. Amelia, the oldest, is finishing a degree in Animal Science at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa and the youngest, Gretchen, is in her first year at Loyola University of Chicago studying environmental health. Both girls and my wife enjoy horseback riding as often as they can. I keep myself busy with my job as a patent attorney and practicing my tuba and the German language. I have degrees in



*The Huebsch family. From left: Amelia, Joe, friend Johannes, Katy, Gretchen*

Chemical Engineering (B.S., Iowa State University), a degree in Biomedical Engineering (M.S., University of Minnesota) and a law degree (J.D., William Mitchell). I really enjoy anything in the science and engineering realm. I also enjoy exercise, especially lifting weights and anything outdoors, such as downhill skiing and trail running. I'm looking forward to helping the board of Siberian Bridges and advancing mutual understanding and respect through my work and interactions with the great people of Russia!



## THE STATEMENT:

*NOTE: This statement was written in reaction to the departure of several board members two years ago to clarify our direction for potential board members. Later, when the idea of having Russian friends help devise projects came up, it was revised to provide a clear statement of purpose for those candidates. That is the version here.*

*This statement was written to reassure people that our direction and activities remain apolitical, non-judgmental and agreeable to all parties. There is a great deal of interest in Russia for friendly cooperation, but the current political climate creates particular difficulties for Russians to work with an American organization of any sort. As stated plainly by a friend there, “The US is the enemy now.” Of course, by “the US” they did not mean all Americans, just our government vis à vis the Russian government. It is clear that the US government also considers Russia “the enemy.” It is very possible that an individual who is formally associated with an American organization, even one as small and whose stated work and record of activities is as friendly and benign as ours—and undoubtedly is well-vetted by Russian AND US security agencies!—may have difficulty with his/her employer, co-workers, and may even find he/she cannot get employed at all. Public association with an American organization, then, is likely not worth the risk in today’s political climate.*

*Nevertheless, and despite the odds, we stay hopeful that we’ll find people who want to participate.*

*Our two countries have been in this situation before, and cultural exchange and cooperation continued nonetheless. We aim to keep that noble tradition alive.*

*Perhaps, dear reader, the above observations have a similar effect on you as they do on me: they emphasize the vital importance of the work of an organization such as Siberian Bridges. Our mission is mutual understanding and respect through person-to-person meeting at the most fundamental level in society: regular people meeting regular people and finding out what they find out. This is the basis of real peace-making, so basic that it doesn’t even need the word “peace,” because it is already the very thing itself.*

*Tom Dickinson*

**The Point of Siberian Bridges and Principles of Action and Behavior by the Organization to Stay on Point.** Revision date: January 22, 2024 (Tom Dickinson)

Siberian Bridges' mission is *“Contact and cooperation between the Trans-Baikal Region (and more broadly Russia) and the Upper Midwest (and more broadly the USA) for the purposes of mutual understanding and respect.”* This is not the formal mission, but it has been generally accepted as the practical mission. I hope the actual Mission Statement can be changed to this one.

The point is to provide opportunities for this contact and cooperation. The current political situation where the US and Russia are antagonistic at the governmental level, makes an organization such as ours that much more crucial, since we work with regular people on regular topics. Both of our populations are encouraged to think a certain way by our governments/powers-that-be, which is normal. During times of antagonism, those narratives may include that antagonism and encourage bad feeling about The Other. Siberian Bridges does not take sides and does not take positions on policies of either the US or the Russian governments, and it does not speak on issues outside its mission. The only ethical positions it takes are those connected to fulfilling the mission: fairness presenting people's opinions, prizing civility, keeping and encouraging good manners and speech.

Siberian Bridges maintains a neutral stance because it is intended to be a mechanism for people getting together to talk, to meet, and to work on projects. An analogy comes to my mind for how Siberian Bridges can fulfill its mission., that we are “the round table of meeting” with no head or foot. This points to SB's job to make anyone feel they can participate freely and express themselves freely given whatever the project's intentions and parameters are. Since SB is an American organization, the “power structure” of it inherently favors how Americans do things, get together, converse, etc. To help correct this imbalance, for the first time I hope we have two Russian board members. They will not have legal standing, though I hope the board can view them as full members, practically speaking.

Another analogy is the concept of being good neighbors. We talk about making “friends,” having “acquaintances,” living with “neighbors.” We talk about “friendly” relations and “cordial” relations. For me, friendship is a serious bond. Neighborly relations, however, do not have to include friendship. They can be merely “friendly” or “cordial” and remain quite formal. As neighbors, we let each other live and don't meddle, but we offer to help, and we find ways to make our neighborhood more peaceful and pleasant. A neighborly relationship has no fundamental characteristics besides respect for boundaries and civil communications. Neighbors build from there.

So that Siberian Bridges can be trusted as a neutral “round table” for meeting in a neighborly way, the following characteristics will maintained by the directors at SB meetings and on their own when acting as directors, and also anyone working with Siberian Bridges:

- Issues of war and peace, or policies of either the US or the Russian governments, etc. will not be discussed before, during or after formal meetings. Likely the meetings will be at my house, so that means no discussion of government policies inside my house in connection to a meeting.

- Again, Siberian Bridges will not make statements of any sort on any policy of our two governments. I expect we will have some kind of social media presence. SB will not make such comments in social media. Also, its directors and anyone working for SB, will not express opinions on our governments' policies while in their capacity as a representative of Siberian Bridges.

Can Siberian Bridges have any connection to political speech? Yes. It could set up and moderate a forum for discussion. Can directors express political opinions? Yes, but not in their capacities as SB directors.

- **PROJECTS:** All projects are funded by donors. We are stewards of the donors' money. Anyone can suggest a project. There are projects by SB for Americans—informational, like the website (that's also international) or a gallery of photos, or a Russia themed dinner, etc. There are/were projects in Russia that we fund like the orphanage. We've sent English speakers to help teach English. There is tourism to Russia, and recent attempts to bring young Russian English students to the US. There have been online video forums to meet socially, to meet to discuss movies/books. And so on. Siberian Bridges has helped with two major university-to-university cooperative efforts, including hosting Russian university officials, in the past where it had no role beyond getting the parties together and helping in the first stages.
  - semiannual newsletter-print and online
  - website to be maintained and updated with new material
  - social media? need to have ones available in US and Russia (Facebook is not in Russia now) like Telegram, VKontakte
- **MEETINGS:** likely every two months
- **MONEY:** no paid positions. Directors commonly donate some amount to the organization annually. We have about \$28,000.00 right now.

*End of Statement*