

Rotary Districts Form United States-Russia Intercountry Committee

Rotary Headquarters was the site where ten Rotary districts from the United States and Russia recently met and formed the largest intercountry committee in the Rotary world. An intercountry committee is composed of districts in two or more countries with the purpose of increasing fellowship and international understanding among the people of various nations. "The mission of an intercountry committee is to build a force that will encourage Rotarians to visit each other's countries and homes, to strengthen friendships and projects so formed by encouraging clubs and districts to connect with clubs and districts in other countries, and to contribute to world peace," according to a June, 2007 decision by the Rotary International Board of Directors.

Although intercountry committees have worked very effectively in Europe since the end of World War II, Rotary leaders in the United States are unfamiliar with the workings of this type of Rotary organization. Recommended activities of intercountry committees include sponsorship of new Rotary clubs, development of a twin club network between participating countries, conduct Friendship Exchanges between the two countries, initiate or carry out World Community Service projects and initiate or carry out Vocational Service projects.

The United States-Russia Intercountry Committee had its beginnings as an ad hoc committee named Friends of Rotary in Russia co-founded by PDGs Jon Eiche (D5890, Texas), a long-time Specialist in Russian and East European Affairs and Steve Yoshida (D5010, Alaska). Rotary leaders from over eighteen districts from Europe, Asia and the United States met at the Presidio of San Francisco, California in August, 2004, the same location that was the birthplace of the United Nations. The Friends of Rotary in Russia helped to promote closer ties between clubs in Russia and the United States through Group Study Exchanges, joint projects and participation in the Annual Rotary in Russia meetings held in the United States and Russia. With the establishment of Rotary District 2220, joining all of the Rotary clubs in Russia, west of the Ural Mountains, the Friends decided to create the US-Russia ICC. The Chartering Ceremony took place on June, 8, 2007 at the beginning of the 12th Annual Rotary in Russia Conference in Skokie/Evanston, Illinois.



Representatives from the ten districts (shown above with RI President Bill Boyd) that make up the new ICC are 2220 covering the 51 clubs around Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Volgograd, Russia, 5010 (Alaska, USA; Yukon, Canada; Russia, East of the Urals), 5030 (Washington, USA), 5450 (northern Colorado), 5500 (Arizona, USA), 5580 (part of Ontario, Canada; North Dakota and parts of Minnesota and Wisconsin, USA), 5690 (parts of Kansas and Oklahoma, USA), 5790 and 5890 (parts of Texas, USA), and 6840 (parts of Louisiana and Mississippi, USA). The districts of the new ICC total more than 25,900 members in 551 clubs.

Rotary in Russia conferences have been held for the past twelve years in various cities of the United States and Russia under the sponsorship of Rotarians in District 5010. As interest in Rotary expansion in Russia grew among districts in the United States, it seemed natural to create an organizational structure that could serve to

promote and strengthen the Rotary movement in Russia. This most recent conference, convened by PDG Jon Eiche from District 5890 (Texas) brought together more than eighty Rotarians from the United States, England, Sweden and Russia for three days to discuss ideas that will strengthen the ties between two nations that previously had been bitter enemies. The conference drew over thirty Rotarians from all areas of Russia.



A highlight of the trip for the Russian Rotarians was a visit to Rotary Headquarters at the beginning of the conference. They interrupted their tour and reception for the Directors of Rotary International, who were meeting at the same time, for this group photo, shown above.



DG Andrei Danilenko from the Moscow Rossica Club(left), DG Jim Devlyn from Tennessee(center) greet PRID Mike Pinson during the tour.

The conference studied the ways that the ICC could be used for future development of Rotary in Russia. Saturday breakout sessions focused on the administration of the new organization, club expansion and membership retention, twin clubs and club sponsoring, current projects in Russia, Rotaract and youth programs, and legal issues facing Rotary in Russia. Major speakers at the conference included President Bill Boyd and Past RI President Carl-Wilhelm Stenhammar.

The U.S.-Russia ICC elected officers that will guide the organization for the next three years: PDGs Jon Eiche (Texas), President; Ron Goodsite (Arizona) Secretary; and Jack Randolph (Alaska) as Treasurer. While the ICC is made up of ten charter districts at this time, two additional districts have already committed to join: District 5870 (Texas) and District 5440 (Wyoming and parts of Nebraska and Colorado. The ICC will accept charter district applications until June 30, 2008. Plans are currently underway to hold the next Rotary in Russia Conference somewhere in Russia, east of the Urals in June, 2008.