



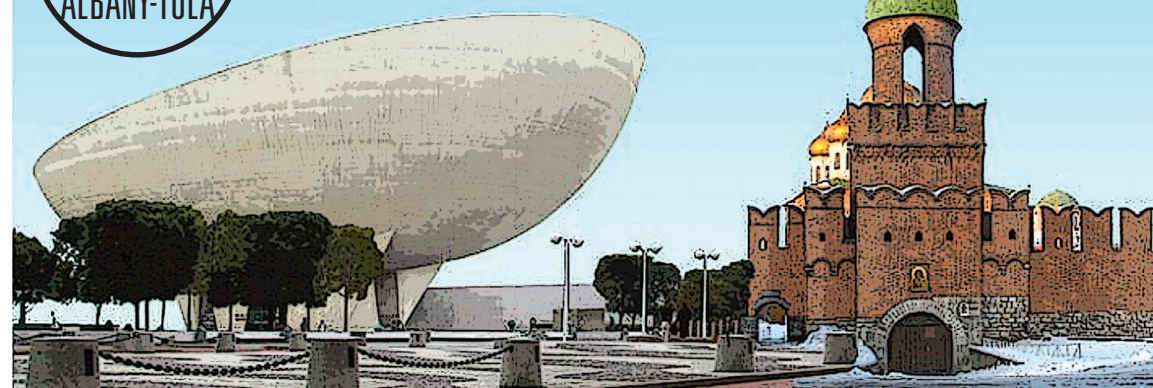
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Promote Peace & Understanding with a Donation

by **Sonja Stark**

Education and Culture Committee Chair, Beth Smith, penned a beautiful summary on the importance of the annual Essay Contest. The summary has been included in the ATA's annual appeal. Beth's son Isaac entered and won the essay contest in 2014. His trip to Russia turned into one of the most memorable experiences of his life. He spent a week touring St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Albany's sister city, Tula, staying with a wonderful host family and immersed in Russian culture. In fact, even after six years, Isaac stays close to those friends & families. For almost 30 years the Alliance has provided opportunities for Capital Region and Tula residents, from business collaborations to environmental studies to cultural and educational exchanges.

The essay contest is a way for students from both cultures to learn more about the other. In less turbulent times, the winners enjoyed trips to Russia with trusted, long-term Alliance Board members and friends. Recently, the awards have been cash scholarships. As Beth can attest, a student who travels to our sister city is part of the Alliance's mission to connect young people in the U.S. with their counterparts in Russia. This helps to promote peace through citizen-to-citizen diplomacy. After Isaac returned, he joined the ATA Board of Directors and served until he left for Stanford University in California. Beth joined the Board shortly thereafter appreciating and understanding the critical importance of an organization that helps to promote peace and understanding in a volatile world.



A newsletter of the Albany-Tula Alliance • A sister city program of Albany, New York and Tula, Russia • People to People, City to City

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2020 Essay Contest Winners

by **Jack Aernecke**



"Youth Saving the World" sparked passion in Capital Region young people as they tackled that topic for the annual essay contest sponsored by the Albany-Tula Alliance.

The young people were asked to write about how young people in the United States and Russia are working on environmental issues.

Students from a number of schools competed for the top prize of \$1,000.

Albany High School senior Amelia Colafati took top honors with her essay citing how ineffective both superpowers have been in curbing planet warming greenhouse gasses. She wrote: "Youth may be the key" in bringing the United States and Russia to renewed cooperation "because the youth of today are the most connected generation in the history of the planet." Colafati added, "youth bring a fervor and energy to this issue because young people's future literally depends upon what they do today." She indicated with cooperation the two countries could help slow the impact of climate change, without that it could lead to the end of humanity.



The second place contestant, who received a check for \$500, is Bethlehem Central senior Michelle Moczulski. She outlined lawsuits filed by adolescents against the U.S. Federal Government for its inaction. She also pointed out the strict restrictions teens face if they try to protest climate change in Russia. She cited the organization Zero Hour, created by Brown University students "to train other students on climate activism."

The winner of the \$250 third prize was Shaker High School sophomore Abigail Poole who outlined a possible reason the younger generation's sense of urgency may be greater than older generations. She wrote that climate change statistics seemed too bad to be real and led to denial. But, she wrote, "Now that climate change has been identified and assessed, kids are starting to find ways they can help."



2021 Sneak Preview!

For 2021, the ATA will be sponsoring a **Multimedia Scholarship Contest** for youth in the Albany and Tula regions. We look forward to celebrating U.S. high school, Russian language school and university students who submit a well-constructed essay, other literary form, or another medium altogether (work of art, video, music) to reflect on their own experiences, historical collaborations and/or ideas about the future their generation will be creating. Please look for our official announcement in January. Enter the contest by visiting the ATA website.

Aren't the Russians our enemies? Why be friends?

by Charlotte Buchanan

Since 1991 when the groups from Albany and Tula agreed to become sister cities, we have established, developed, expanded, achieved, and exchanged our goals with each other, and broadened and enhanced many lives. Many kinds of relationships formed, including formal governmental, traditional educational, internships, friendships, and more. A helping hand in the beginning from Americans to the Russians, when they had a need, quickly turned into many partnerships.

We wanted, among other goals, to connect American individuals and families with Russians, encouraging them to learn about each other and establish long-term relationships. We wanted to provide understanding and training to adults as they transitioned from a planned economy to a free market economy. We wanted to develop and maintain long-term economic, educational, and cultural ties between the Capital Region of New York and Tula, and we did.

Americans from the Capital Region and Russians from Tula who have met, have gotten to know each other and each other's culture, have been lucky to be in each others' schools and universities, to teach and to learn from each other, to experience each other's music and celebrations, to share meals, to open our homes and families to each

other. We expanded who we are by better understanding each other and connecting in many ways.



Currently, the difficulties between our two governments strain our goals and achievements. The government of Russia in 1991 was developing a democracy, but now is authoritarian. The American government has taken many hostile positions towards Russia in recent years and imposed many sanctions. The Russian government retaliates. Just one example is that the U.S.A. has made it extremely difficult for Russians to get any kind of visa to the U.S.A. That has eliminated internships, exchanges in areas such as education, health, and the environment. The outstanding Russian music groups that used to introduce Russian music in many of our schools, and perform at fund raising concerts are no longer allowed in our country. Please remember, it is the governments that create the problems and develop hostilities. Citizens in both countries are generally focused

on families, their children, friends and their communities. Ordinary Americans and Russians have been generous and eager to be friends. The internet and telephones help to keep us linked.

It feels more like the Cold War, which makes it harder and harder to stay connected and receive knowledge and truth. Lack of knowledge and truth is the mother of fear that divides and can lead to war. Keeping a stream of understanding and respect for each other, sharing some values and goals can lead from a small stream to rivers of betterment and peace wherever it goes and whomever it touches. That is why it is important and why we continue to want to keep the people and organizations of Tula and the Capital Region of New York connected. We hope that you understand and agree and that you will help us.

When we open our doors, our homes, ourselves, we make fewer mistakes in what we know and believe about each other. We let go of biases, stereotypes, and lies. Then we can work together, cooperate, and respect each other for the betterment of all. We leave a legacy for our children that we can be proud of and about which we hope that the people who come after us will continue to build on for the benefit of all people.

ATA Welcomes Four New Board Members

by Sonja Stark

The ATA welcomed four fresh faces to the board this year: School of Public Health Assistant Professor, Xiaobo Xue, V.P. for Enrollment Management at the College of St. Rose, Mary Grondahl, University student Robert Willard and Elena Molchanova. Ana Galeano, local attorney, was also unanimously approved to rejoin the board. Willard is also President of the World Aral Region Charity, a Non-profit for disaster relief in the Aral Sea Region of Western Uzbekistan. We are excited to have

Molchanova join our board from Tula. She first came to Albany in 2001 as an intern of the SABIT Program and has been involved with the ATA since then as a friend of many ATA members. She helped organize trips of the Albany Law School professors and American business people in 2002-2003 when they lectured on law and business in Russia. She also was a facilitator and an interpreter for several Open World groups in 2003 and 2005. And, she hosted several Board members on their trips to Russia. She is a co-owner of a translation company in Tula, and currently divides her time between Tula and Moscow.



Russian "Lod'ja" or Pilgrim Ship Docks in Albany

by Sonja Stark

In late July, the 18th-century Russian replica cargo ship called "Lod'ja" or Pilgrim made a two-week stopover in Albany bringing with it maritime memorabilia for all to enjoy. Delayed by the pandemic, but not defeated, the vessel had sailed 10,000 miles across several oceans, including the Atlantic, and up the Hudson River with the purpose spreading cultural goodwill. It docked next to the Dutch Apple Cruise line inviting all to learn about Russian boat building and tour the history museum below deck. 46-year-old Captain Sergey Sinelnik, was accompanied by two fresh faces from Florida, first mates Yuriy Pogorelskiy, 50, and Aleksey Volchok, 42. When Sinelnik was a young



boy he dreamed of building a ship to sail around the world. Weighing just 14 tons, the Pilgrim was built strong enough to withstand winter sea ice and strong gales and small enough to maneuver shallow rivers and inlets. Members of the ATA, Anton Konev and Charlotte Buchanan, went to great lengths to coordinate the arrival, securing dock space next to the Dutch Apple cruise lines and arranging a media blitz for the sailing demonstration. Times Union writer, Paul Grondahl penned a beautiful feature story on their sailing adventures while ATA board member, Sonja Stark shot/edited a video of the demo. Both links can be found on the ATA

website.

Goals & Plans continue through COVID-19

by Sonja Stark

When COVID-19 hit in late February of this year, the ATA wisely agreed to pivot our monthly meetings at the Times Union building to a virtual platform. Initiated by Vladimir Kuperman, a ZOOM invite was adapted to continue our progress with relative ease. In lieu of our traditional Essay Contest reception at the Fort Orange Club, we recognized our winners and entries using the platform along with mailing gifts and prizes.

Led by Business Development Chair, Mel Chudzik, a Strategic Planning Committee made up of ad hoc committee members was formed that met via ZOOM several times over the summer to brainstorm a list of goals and objectives to keep our sister-city engaged during these troubled

times. During those months, we improved the governance structure by creating a number of initiatives with corresponding action plans to track our progress. A total of nine strategies were created including updating our mission statement and the debut of a new website in time for our 30th anniversary in 2021.

replacement along with identifying a grant writer to support our financial stability. Vladimir Kuperman was tasked with continuing to engage the Tulan community and reestablish connections with Tula State and Tula Pedagogical University. And, Sonja Stark was tasked with a multimedia presentation with past essay contest winners to help attract more participation.



Among our many goals, Jerry Shaye was tasked with finding a Chair

