



Around Our World

ROANOKE VALLEY SISTER CITIES, INC.

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President's Report: Communicating our mission statement to a wider audience



By Mary Jo Fassie
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As RVSCI president, it has been my pleasure to educate the public about our organization and its cities abroad and to communicate the message of the RVSCI Mission Statement, approved by the membership at our 2016 annual dinner:

Roanoke Valley Sister Cities is committed to fostering and encouraging mutual understanding, friendship and peace

through cultural, medical, economic, educational and professional exchanges among the people of the Roanoke Valley and the citizens of our seven sister cities on four continents.

I have enjoyed speaking to groups and individuals in the Roanoke Valley about the wonderful programs that RVSCI sponsors and working with our members who are committed to this mission. Feel free to contact me if you would like me to be a guest speaker at any event or club meeting in the Roanoke Valley.

During the summer of 2016, my routine was somewhat halted as I underwent several eye surgeries in June and August. Thankfully, the problem

was arrested so that I could get back to working on behalf of RVSCI (and babysitting my grandson, Orion!).

As we look forward to 2017, let us hope that more Roanoke Valley citizens will learn about our organization. If you have not had the chance, please stop by the Roanoke Municipal Building to view the seven beautiful cabinets, located in the corridor between the new and old buildings, highlighting each of our cities and an eighth one for Roanoke. This is a wonderful tribute to our organization, reminding and informing the citizens of the Roanoke Valley about our international connections.

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This fall, RVSCI was fortunate to move its display cases from the Roanoke Civic Center into new digs at the city of Roanoke Municipal Building. The eight display cases are now in a highly trafficked hallway connecting the main entrance, on Church Avenue, to its renovated area on the north side of building. Our thanks to the city of Roanoke, and especially to Mike Shockley, director of general services.

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Here are some of the ways I have worked on communicating our mission statement in 2016:

June

- Met with Vice President Bill Bestpitch and Secretary Jean Broyles to discuss the RVSCI brochure.
- Met with outgoing Roanoke Mayor David Bowers at the Municipal Building.
- Attended a reception for Mayor Sherman Lea.

July

- Attended the Sister Cities International Conference in Washington, D.C., with Jean Broyles and Linda Harrison.
- Presided over the summer RVSCI board meeting.
- Attended the St-Lô Bastille Day picnic.

August

- Met with Secretary Jean Broyles.
- Completed a search for the certificate and articles of incorporation for RVSCI required by the Richmond Office of Consumer Services.

September

- Met with fall intern Julie Tugwell, about her projects and research.
- Set up a booth for Olde Salem Days with Jean Broyles, Julie Tugwell and Bill Saari.
- Met with Wonju Chairman Brian Counihan.
- Discussed an RVSCI section at the new Williamson Road branch library with the head librarian and Brian Counihan.
- Communicated with the Ferrum College exchange student in Pskov and the student from Pskov at Ferrum.
- Presided over the RVSCI board meeting.

October

- Attended the Internship Fair at Roanoke College.
- Worked on the new RVSCI display cases at the Municipal Building.
- Attended the talk by Dr. Pinto at VTCSOM and ate dinner with him and RVSCI representatives.
- Sent a report to Mr. Lawhorn at the Roanoke City Budget Office.
- Attended the Tai Chi class in Salem with Roanoke-Lijiang members.
- Gave a presentation on RVSCI at the Roanoke Kiwanis Club luncheon/meeting.
- Met with Local Colors Executive Director Beth Lutjen and Bill Bestpitch at the Local Colors office.
- Attended the dinner for the Lijiang delegation at the Sheraton Hotel.

November

- Attended the reception for St-Lô artist Cornelia Marin at the Grandin Theatre.
- Was interviewed about RVSCI at WFJX / Fox Radio.
- Ate lunch with intern Julie Tugwell to discuss her duties.
- Met with RVSCI Treasurer Wayne Firebaugh about the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services form and mailed it by the deadline.
- Ate dinner with the St-Lô committee and artist Cornelia Marin at Our Daily Bread.
- Attended the Kisumu talk by Doug Brainard via Skype at the South County Library.
- Gave a presentation about RVSCI to the Athenian Society at WDBJ (Channel 7).
- Spoke with Daniel Black of Alpha Zeta Agricultural Fraternity at Va. Tech about a March event and possibly connecting one of our sister cities.
- Met with Cindy Petersen, Taubman Museum of Art Deputy Director of Education and Visitor Services, at the Taubman about her project involving art museums and Asian culture, which could involve Wonju and/or Lijiang.
- Presided over the RVSCI board meeting.

December

- Attended the Florianópolis holiday luncheon at Carlos.
- Prepared and sent a letter to the Roanoke City Department of Management and Budget describing in length the RVSCI activities and benefits of receiving funding from city of Roanoke.
- Attended the St-Lô Dîner de Noël.



Ruphina Okeyo, Julie Tugwell, Jean Broyles and Bill Saari at the Olde Salem Days RVSCI bake sale.

Meet our RVSCI interns for fall 2016 and spring 2017

By Mary Jo Fassié, president, RVSCI
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This fall the RVSCI board has had the pleasure of working with Julie Tugwell from Asheboro, N.C., as our intern from Roanoke College. Julie is an International Relations major with a concentration in East Asian Studies and Global Business. She has studied Chinese with Professor Rebecca Chang, chairwoman of the Lijiang committee, and traveled to China this past year. On the campus of Roanoke College, Julie is a member of Alpha Sigma Alpha sorority and was chosen as a senator to the Roanoke College Student Government Association. She participates in Roanoke College Intramural sports, has served as a speaker at several college events and has been on the Dean's List.

In addition, Julie finds the time to volunteer at Angels of Assisi and to pursue her passion of horseback riding, serving as an instructor.

Julie's duties for us this fall have included:

- Setting up an Instagram account and posting photos and announcements of RVSCI events
- Establishing a Twitter account for RVSCI
- Aiding Professor Chang at a Tai Chi event
- Helping us at Olde Salem Days
- Attending the dinner for the Lijiang delegation in October
- Researching possible opportunities for an exchange with the St-Lô and the Roanoke Valley equestrian communities
- Communicating to me and our spring intern, Emily Crane, tactics for organizing the RVSCI Young Artists project next spring
- Selling T-shirts at the annual dinner
- Attending all RVSCI board meetings

We send our best wishes to Julie as she finishes her studies at Roanoke College, and we hope to see her again as a possible intern to our Sister City of Lijiang!

In January, we are looking forward to working with Emily Crane who is also pursuing a degree in International Relations at Roanoke College but is minoring in French. She has served as an intern in St-Lô, France, and as an English teacher in Meknes, Morocco, where she acquired a basic knowledge of Arabic. This past year, Emily served as a program analyst for the U.S. Department of State and as an intern for Education for Employment in Washington, D.C.

Emily will continue to keep us connected via social media and will attend sister city events. She will spearhead the RVSCI Young Artists competition in the spring from which we will choose entries for the Sister Cities International Competition in May.



Julie Tugwell



Emily Crane

Welcoming visitors and learning new skills

*By Rebecca Chang, chairwoman
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2016 was a busy year for the Roanoke-Lijiang committee. January saw the signing of our sister city agreement, reaffirming the close ties between our two cities. Nine months later, in October, Lijiang sent a second delegation to Roanoke for further exploration of cooperative activities.

The members of these two delegations represented different branches of the Lijiang government and leadership of the local communities. They all loved the quiet lifestyle of our mid-sized city. They also loved our beautiful scenery and clear air. Above all, they appreciated the friendship and hospitality we extended to them. The bond between the two cities is growing stronger.

In early October, the Lijiang Committee sponsored a Tai Chi seminar at the Dancing Crane – the center for traditional Chinese medicine in Salem. It was taught by Master Greg Johnston, a

traditional Chinese medicine practitioner and Tai Chi teacher. Greg received his Master of Oriental Medicine degree in 2003. He began his study of martial arts in 1995 and internal martial arts in 1999. He opened Dancing Crane Center of Chinese Medicine in 2004. In addition to treating patients, he offers classes in Qi Gong, Taiji Quan, Ba Gua Zhang, TCM nutrition and various aspects of Chinese medicine. He has been a guest lecturer at Roanoke College, Virginia Tech, Radford University and Jefferson School of Health Sciences. About 30 people attended the seminar, and the response from the participants was quite positive. We hope to have more programs like this in the future.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Roanoke Sister City Board, Mayor Lea and his staff, and the members of the Roanoke-Lijiang committee for their support, commitment and hard work. And I wish everyone a happy and prosperous 2017.



Roanoke Mayor Sherman Lea poses with a member of the Lijiang delegation at City Hall.



In October, Rebecca Chang and Bill Bestpitch took members of the Lijiang delegation to Roanoke's Mill Mountain.



On Oct. 9, about 30 people turned out for a Tai Chi seminar at the Dancing Crane Center in Salem.



From left: Rebecca Chang poses with Mary Jo Fassie, Julie Tugwell and a member of the Lijiang delegation at the welcome dinner in October.



Roanoke city officials, valley dignitaries and RVSCI board members pose with the Lijiang delegation in October.



Roanoke-Lijiang founder Pearl Fu and Rebecca Chang smile at the welcome dinner for the delegation in October.

Let us introduce you to 'polka with attitude'

By Kris Slowikowski, chairwoman
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We hope you like to polka or are interested in learning how to polka. The Chardon Polka Band will be visiting Roanoke sometime in 2017 (we hope) to help us enjoy that vigorous three-beat dance. Plans are in progress for having a fundraiser with this awesome young creative group, which is based in Ohio. This lively band has several albums to

their credit and even a Claymation TV series. The albums "World War Polka," "Polka Around the Christmas Tree" and "A Fistful of Polka" are just three of their delightful collections that will make you want to tap your feet and just dance. Find them on You Tube by searching for Chardon Polka Band. My personal You Tube favorite is their version of Beyonce's "Single Ladies."

Stay tuned for future announcements. This will be a fun-filled event not to be missed.



In their 12 years together, the members of the Chardon Polka Band have made a name for themselves by adding a colorful twist to the traditional genre of the polka.

Visit by Brazilian doctor strengthens ties with RVSCI, city and VTCSOM

By Joslaine Austin and Ana Machado Silva,
Roanoke-Florianópolis members



Dr. Gustavo Pinto and Joslaine Austin are interviewed by local TV journalists during Dr. Pinto's visit to city council chambers.

In October, Roanoke Valley Sister Cities had the honor of hosting Dr. Gustavo Pinto, a key partner in building the relationships among the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and Research Institute, the city of Roanoke, RVSCI and the Universidade do Sul de Santa Catarina (UNISUL). Dr. Pinto is an infectious-disease physician and researcher from Florianópolis. Upon hearing of Dr. Pinto's arrival to the United States in October, many local Brazilian community members were happy to assist in showing him around the area

and sharing ideas for strengthening the exchange program with UNISUL.

Upon his arrival to the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport, Dr. Pinto was met with enthusiasm by leaders in the community. On Oct. 3, soon after his arrival, Dr. Pinto spent his lunch hour discussing the partnership with Joslaine Austin, the former president of the Roanoke-Florianópolis group and an active member of RVSCI. That afternoon, at City Council Chambers, he met with Dr. David Trinkle – who serves both as city councilman and as associate dean for community and culture at VTCSOM -- and was introduced to Mayor Lea.

Dr. Pinto also met with Dr. Helena Carvalho, assistant professor of biomedical Science at VTCSOM, and spoke about the plans for the partnership over breakfast.

While coordinating with local community leaders, politicians and scholars, Dr. Pinto was able to sample local Brazilian cuisine and local small business trade. On Oct. 4, he presented a community lecture on the Brazilian health system, the fight against the Zika virus and opportunities in international

exchange of information and resources. After the lecture, Dr. Pinto was gratefully hosted by city, VTSCoM and RVSCI officials for dinner at Carlos Brazilian International Cuisine.

Dr. Pinto reciprocated their sentiments of warmth and thankfulness stating, "Visiting Roanoke and VTCSOM was a great, unique opportunity to strengthen our relationship. Our exchange program may improve the skills of our students and professors as doctors, as well as human beings. We need people with a wider view of the world. Um abraço."



Dinner at Carlos, hosted by city, medical school and RVSCI officials, was a delicious ending to Dr. Pinto's successful visit.

Hopes are high for bi-annual student exchanges

By Brian Counihan, chairman
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This time last year, the Roanoke-Wonju committee was busily preparing for the visit of 12 middle school students and a teacher chaperon from Wonju. The students arrived in January and stayed with host families around our valley for three weeks. Our committee arranged for the student group to visit many regional cultural sites, including food tours and museum visits. It was a lot of work, but we made new friends and had such a good time that it is hoped we will establish a student exchange that will take place bi-annually.

We are taking some time this year to explore ways in which this exchange



In January 2016, a delegation of Wonju middle schoolers came to Roanoke to live and study for three weeks. Here they are seen visiting Century Plaza in downtown Roanoke with RVSCI vice president Bill Bestpitch.

can fulfill our Sister City mission and be beneficial to the citizens of both cities. A delegation from Wonju had planned a visit in November 2016, but they had to cancel the visit as it coincided with our national election day. The visit would have been very useful as the nature of our student exchange thus far has been run by Wonju City on the Korean side,

and of course by volunteers on our side, an official visit would have helped clarify expectations for both cities.

If you are interested in getting involved with Wonju Sister Cities, and can spare just 10 hours of your time to help with organizational tasks or organizing an event, please contact me as we could use some extra hands!

Hokie shares message of efforts for cleaner water in Kisumu

By Bill Modica, chairman
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On Nov. 10, the Roanoke- Kisumu Sister City group hosted a program about efforts to bring cleaner water to Kisumu. Doug Brainard, a Virginia Tech graduate, worked there this summer as a volunteer for 6 weeks installing water-treatment units and promoting their use to purify local water sources for better health. Via Skype, Doug shared his experiences, showed pictures and answered questions about the conditions in Kisumu. He also promoted micro-finance initiatives to help small businesses get started and encourage economic growth.

Doug noted that locals who have jobs earn about \$7 to \$12 per day. Many work as vendors or local handymen and earn less. Security guards earn only \$3 per night. The main foods are

cornmeal dishes, fruits, rice and fish plus sometimes chicken. The main transportation is by mini-bikes called *boda-boda*, and personal taxis, called *tok-tok*. Parents pay for their children to go to school and often must buy uniforms for them. Still, according to Doug, the economy was stable and life was pretty good.

Generally, he said, it was a safe place to visit. There had been political unrest before he arrived, mostly from the opposition party who are challenging the current regime. Elections will be held in 2017. He got to see Lake Victoria and join fishermen, who make up a major part of the local economy. The lake was polluted near the shore, but clearer further out. Many locals draw their water from the lake and do their wash there.

The Kisumu group also heard from Ruphina Okeyo who is working on a project to store fresh food products



Virginia Tech graduate Doug Brainard (left) spent his summer in Kisumu installing water-treatment units. He's shown here with one of the units and two Kisumu residents.

for resale later in the year. Most food is harvested and eaten immediately and food storage is a glaring need. Our group will consider how we can help out. We have also been in touch with a local group in Kisumu that is working to establish a business council. We voted to join in that effort by becoming a business member. Bill Modica, Mary Jo Fassié, Jean Broyles and Linda Harrison were present at this meeting as were about a half dozen other members.

Semester at Ferrum helped student abandon stereotypes

By Vladimir Semenov
Ferrum College exchange student



Vladimir Semenov of Pskov spent the fall semester at Ferrum College. Here he is shown during a camping excursion sponsored by Ferrum Outdoors.

Hello, my name is Vladimir and I'm an exchange student at Ferrum College. I was born and raised in Velikie Luki in Russia, but after my graduation from the school I moved to another city and entered Pskov State University. Pskov is situated near the European border in the west of Russia; it's one of the oldest Russian cities, and it played a big role in the history of our country. I like to study languages and communicate with foreigners; also, I like to learn culture, traditions, and lifestyles of other countries. That's why my major area of studying in the university is linguistics. One day I want to move out of Russia and get a job abroad.

After only one year of studying in Pskov University, I got an opportunity to come to the USA and study here for the

fall semester. It's not my first trip abroad. I've already been to some African and European countries for vacation, but I've never spent more than two weeks in these countries, and I've never studied in the other countries. That's why living at Ferrum is a very strong experience for me. It took me a while to make the decision, and until the last moment, I wasn't sure that I would be studying in the U.S. ... Now I can say that [Russian] people usually have a wrong picture of the U.S., so I would like my friends and siblings to see this country more correctly.

First of all, I want to say that I was impressed with courses that Ferrum College offers. Students here have a great opportunity to take various courses, from common English and Philosophy to Fundamentals of Acting and Rock climbing! These courses can help you to get new knowledge, learn languages, sciences, history, improve your physical fitness, raise your self-esteem and self-confidence level, and, of course, you can get new friends and just have fun! While choosing courses for this semester I was trying to match them with courses I have had in Russia. It was my fault, I missed a lot of interesting classes.

The second thing, and my favorite thing, about America I want to note is the friendly people. Unfortunately, I've been only to few cities in the U.S. (Roanoke, Washington, Richmond) and most of my time I spend on campus, but I can assume with a high degree of certainty that one of the best qualities of American citizens is their amicability. It's not a mystery in the U.S. that a person who you see the first time in your life will be as kind and cordial as your best friend. In Russia you barely can meet a stranger who will say hello to you. In my opinion, such friendliness can easily lift your

mood and give you energy for the entire day.

Moreover, I like studying at Ferrum College because here you feel like a member of the big family. This is reflected in how students treat each other, how professors talk to students, and even the way we dress. There is a homey atmosphere at Ferrum. Here you feel free; this is what people need when they come to another country or another city. We all want to feel like we are at home. At Ferrum it's not hard to find something that you need. All the students have an opportunity to do sports, engage in creativity, play games with their friends, and attend different events. Here you never get bored because college offers you a lot to help you find yourself.

I'm really interested in the way Americans see Russia. That's why I usually ask people to tell me some stereotypes about Russia that they know. The majority of "respondents" think that in Russia it's always cold. In fact, it's not true. Russia has a lot of different climate zones. We do have places where it's always cold and places where it's hot, but the majority of the population lives in a zone where climate depends on a season of the year. So, if one day you go to Russia, remember that it's not always necessary to wear a hat with earflaps and a down jacket.

In conclusion, I would like to say that if I didn't have an opportunity to study and live in the USA and to see the culture from within, I would never get a genuine picture of this country. All the stereotypes and the things you hear about other countries are not necessarily true. People shouldn't judge any culture or tradition if they have never seen the country from the inside. I am very glad that this experience helped me to break a mistaken view of the U.S.

Ferrum student falls in love with the Russian people

By Rachel Swyhart,
Ferrum College exchange student in Pskov



Rachel Swyhart

PSKOV, Pskov Oblast, Russia -- The rivers meet, waves lapping along the shore with easy gentle motions that rock the city to sleep. The air is brisk and cold. The rush of traffic fades away, leaving the city in an icy hush. Overhead a black sky is lit by a thousand warm lampposts. On the corner of the river behind a great white wall rises the ancient *kremlin* (citadel or fortress, in English). Inside is a massive church. Up the steep steps and through the arched doorways lies a chamber dripping in gold and shining icons. Every side of the kremlin is reined in by a fortress and the golden peak glimmers in the spotlights like a beacon in the night. This is the heart of the city of Pskov.

My name is Rachel Swyhart. I'm a senior at Ferrum College, and I'm participating in an exchange program with Pskov University in Pskov, Russia, for this fall semester.



Rachel and fellow foreign students enjoy a card party during their free time.

I arrived on Sept. 1.

I was raised in Lynchburg, so this bustling place is more city than I've ever lived in. This trip was a huge leap of faith for me. I've been studying British Literature, Creative Writing, Studio Art, and Russian as a foreign language for four years. This fall, instead of cramming for classes or plotting my last Halloween bash with my college buddies, I'm bent over my notebooks in a cramped little dormitory room in Russia.

About Pskov: Holding more than a dozen ancient churches like the kremlin, most of them five times older than my country, Pskov is considered more of a town than a city. Despite its size and the fact that if you ride the bus for 30 minutes you're still somewhere in the middle of the city, Pskov is said to be a township. St. Petersburg is 290 kilometers (180 miles) away and it has 5 million people, so it dwarfs Pskov with 205,000 people. Russia has 46 provinces called *oblasts*. Pskov Oblast is in the north of Russia, almost kissing Finland, and Riga, the capital of Latvia, is just as close as St. Petersburg. The biggest cities nearby are Novgorod, with its lovely river beaches, and historical Vladivostok.

It took me 10 hours by plane to reach Moscow and 12 hours by sleeper train to get from Moscow to Pskov city. Now, I live in a dormitory that's a 15-minute walk from the train station where I arrived. The closest building of Pskov University is 20 minutes on foot. The building in which I have most of my classes is 45 minutes on foot, and 15 minutes by bus. I have befriended several female European exchange students, and they like to walk. A lot. So, every day I walk between 2-3 hours in total, running from building to building like a madwoman in the snow and pouring rain.

So why am I even in Russia? The starting point to all this was totally random. I got placed into a foreign language course despite my initial



Rachel Swyhart is shown in profile at a film festival in Pskov in September. "Independent directors showed their films and they were outstanding," says Rachel.

emphasis in art and English. That foreign language course was Russian 101. I didn't even know that Ferrum had a Russian program, yet there I was on Day One in a room filled with other confused freshmen. This is a lesson to all freshmen that if you take your entry test and click the box that says that you like languages, you too might end up in Russia.

But all of that is alright! A combination of great classmates, a love for new languages, and a passionate teacher led me to take Russian 102. Then 201, and 202, and eventually I figured why not just slap in another minor? So here I am with two minors and a comfy English major, doing pretty well in Russian class and loving it, when four of my friends pop over to Russia for a semester. Siberia. Latvia. Moscow. Uzbekistan. These were people only one year ahead of me and I thought, *oh my God. That could be me!*

Guess what? I thought a little too loudly and someone heard me. Professor Rachel Stauffer loves Russia. It's only natural she'd love sending her students to Russia. The second I mentioned the fact that I'd like to go to Russia someday, Professor Stauffer got together with my advisor to decide when and where I was going. They decided on Pskov. Everything was happening quickly and I was nervous, so I took a few days to decide before realizing something. If I didn't seize this opportunity now I'd

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Pskov, with the kremlin in the background.

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never get another chance like this again. When will I ever get another chance to live in Russia?

So far, I've loved my time here. Traveling in Russia is terrifying and exhausting. Nothing ever happens on time. The teachers speak only Russian, it already snowed once on Oct. 25, and now the weather is 32 degrees, but I'll never regret seizing this opportunity. There are people here that I never imagined I'd meet. They're from Afghanistan and China, Turkey and Moldova, Thailand and Germany and Uzbekistan and Finland; beautiful,

kind, cultured people from all over the world live in this dormitory building with me and it's just like having a surrogate family. People come and people go. Tears are shed and new bonds are forged and every day is different, exciting, and shocking in new and amazing ways. The people are the reason I came, and the people are the reason that I dread leaving.

I love the Russian people. They are charming and sweet, polite and caring, and never without some sort of affectionate remark. In the Moscow train station I was broke, alone, and unable to find my train. I had no food. No water. The taxi service stole all my money. And sitting mournfully on a bench on the platform after eight hours in the train station drifting in and out of sleep, I was approached and charmed by an older Russian man, his sister, and his wife who were also journeying to Pskov. They asked me my name. After my short choppy Russian explanation, they piled food into my bag, their faces alive with kindness and concern. The sister said to me, "I have a daughter just like you, grown and gone." She poured me a cup

of soda from her thermos, ordering me to eat a meat bun while she was watching so that when we were separated by our car assignments she'd know I'd gotten something to eat.

They told me which train car was mine and where to go. They hugged me, blessed me, and then gave me their phone numbers. The husband demanded I call as soon as I settled in to Pskov. When I got off the train in Pskov they hugged me and made me swear that I'd call. Without them, I would've gone hungry for two days. I never would have found my train or my bed or my city. And so to Youlia, and Sasha and his darling wife, I give all the thanks I have to give.

And I say that despite everything that's happened and everything I feel about the way things are between our governments, I love this country and I love its people. I feel as content here as I do anywhere in America. Maybe I'll never have a permanent place in Russia, but I'm lucky to be able to say that for the short time I'm blessed to be here Russia has certainly made itself home for me. For that, I'll be forever grateful.

An extraordinary experience for young Roanoke delegation

*By Siobhan Scro, vice chairwoman
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On June 20, 2016, 11 students from William Byrd, Cave Spring, Glenvar and Salem high schools along with four adults took off from the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport for the 9th exchange trip in 18 years for the Roanoke/St-Lô sister cities. This year's exchange made a departure from its customary sojourn to stay with host families in Roanoke's French sister city of St-Lô for one week and to spend a week touring in other parts of France (Paris). Because the Eurocup's month-long soccer championship took place in

Paris this summer, this year's exchange maintained the tradition of staying with host families in St-Lô but afterward, went on a 10-day tour of Eastern Europe, visiting the cities of Berlin, Prague, Krakow and Budapest.

St-Lô, in the Lower Normandy region of France, was delivered from Nazi control by the Allies in 1944. Among the liberators was a Roanoker, Sgt. Bob Slaughter (Company D, 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry, 29th Division), who would return to St-Lô for the 50th anniversary of D-Day and launch the formation of the Roanoke/St-Lô sister city partnership. At the American Cemetery in Coleville, this summer's delegation paid their respects to the soldiers who died defending



The Roanoke summer delegation is all smiles on a stop in Normandy.

democracy. They also enjoyed a picnic lunch on the shores of Omaha Beach. The group viewed the Bayeux Tapestry, an embroidered masterpiece that is 230 feet long and 20 inches high, created in 1077, depicting the Norman conquest of England and featuring William (the Conqueror), Duke of Normandy,

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Saint-Lô

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and Harold, Earl of Wessex, later King of England. They participated in the pilgrimage of crossing 4 miles of the Bay of the Mont Saint Michel at low tide to reach the spectacular abbey of the Mont Saint Michel. The host families in St-Lô and surrounding towns furnished the Roanoke travelers the ultimate in hospitality and fellowship, ever strengthening the bonds of friendship between the two sister cities.

After many tearful good-byes and promises to remain in touch, Roanoke's Sister City ambassadors flew to Berlin, Germany, to begin a study of World War II from its origins. They stayed in what was formerly East Berlin. Although much has changed since the fall of the Berlin Wall, many traces linger that remind one of the Communist rule that was in existence just 27 years ago. While in Berlin, the group walked through the Holocaust Memorial Exhibition, were silenced in the Museum of the Topography of Terror and stood before what still stands of the Berlin Wall. Dresden, Germany, was a welcome stop. This lovely city has been revived to its pre-war luster.

Prague, Czech Republic, drew many admiring expressions. This jewel of a metropolis was a favorite of Adolf Hitler's and was thus spared from the ravages of warfare. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, it too, was relieved of Communist rule and became open to the public. Such beauty to behold in this beautiful Bohemian city! Prague Castle, The Charles Bridge, the Prague astronomical clock, Old Town Square and The Jewish Quarter were must-see cultural attractions.

Krakow, Poland, a vibrant and welcoming medieval city boasted its Saint Mary's Basilica, Rynek Glowny Market Square, Old Town, Jewish Quarter and the BEST hot chocolate in the world! The Wieliczka Salt Mines were a great source of fascination for all. While in Krakow, the WWII-era concentration camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau were also visited. The silence was deafening as one passed under the infamous archway bearing the cynical phrase, "Arbeit Macht Frei" ("Work Sets You Free"). This experience rendered Roanoke's young emissaries aghast at the horrors that man has committed against his fellow

man. Such a visit inspires resolution to do better to treat others with respect, compassion and kindness.

The final stop on this world tour was to the imperial city of Budapest. The rich history and grandeur of Hungary was revealed in its Heroes Square, St. Matthias Church, Great Market Hall, Chain Bridge, Szechenyi Thermal Baths and Parliament Buildings. An evening cruise along the Danube River illuminated many of these magnificent sites for a most appreciative audience.

The 2016 Roanoke/St-Lô sister city envoys returned home on July 7 with many souvenirs. Specifically, they brought home the memento that "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it," a quote from philosopher George Santayana that appears at the entry of one of the prisoner residences at Auschwitz. This exchange trip was an extraordinary experience for all. It punctuated the importance of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's inception of Sister Cities, whereby we seek to promote peace through mutual respect, understanding and cooperation -- one individual, one community at a time



Crossing the chilly bay toward the abbey of the Mont Saint Michel.



Students pay their respects to the fallen at the American cemetery in Colleville, France.



Holding signs that show that this year's Tour de France race passed through St-Lô.



This fall, Saint-Lô artist Cornelia Marin (right) returned to work and exhibit in Roanoke for the third time. She was hosted by her friend Brenda Barksdale (left), who arranged an exhibition and successful sale of Cornelia's works at The Grandin Theatre through the month of November.

Lettre de la présidente

*Cammie Williams, chairwoman of Roanoke - St-Lô
crwilliams@rcs.k12.va.us*

The Saint-Lô group had an eventful November and December. Multi-media artist Cornelia Marin from Saint-Lô returned to Roanoke for her third time, thanks to the sponsorship of Roanoker Brenda Barksdale. She exhibited a new series of women's portraits at The Grandin Theatre. Our group also enjoyed an evening with her at Our Daily Bread on Brambleton Avenue. Then on Dec. 6, for our annual Dîner de Noël, member Chris Bohannon gave a PowerPoint presentation about the year he and Betsy spent in Nantes, in the Pays de la Loire region. What a treat! We also enjoyed the fare at 419 West and discussed ideas for the upcoming 20th anniversary of our twinning with Saint-Lô. If you have any ideas or questions, please contact Cammie Williams at 540.556.8975 or crwilliams@rcs.k12.va.us

And Bonne Année!

RVSCI Corporate Board Members

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Lijiang: Rebecca Chang

Opole: Dr. Kristina Bulas-Slowikowski

Pskov: Rachel Stauffer

St-Lô: Cammie Williams

Wonju: Brian Counihan

Contact us at: roanokevalleysistercities@gmail.com

Save the date!

Jan. 16 - Feb. 10 - Visit to Roanoke from 3 medical students from Wonju

Feb. 4 - Chinese New Year at the Taubman Museum of Art

Feb. 13 - RVSCI at the Roanoke College Internship Fair

April 12 - VTCSOM International Student Forum

May 20 - Annual Local Colors Festival, Elmwood Park, downtown Roanoke

June 1 - RVSCI Annual Dinner at Roanoke College



Annual Membership - Roanoke Valley Sister Cities

New Renewal July 1, 20____ - June 30, 20____

Cities: Wonju Kisumu Pskov Florianópolis Opole Lijiang St-Lô

Student: \$10 - one city ___ # cities x \$10 = _____

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