

From Fairhope By Dean Arnold

Our trip to the Soviet Union was truly rewarding and beneficial. The most meaningful part was getting a better understanding of how people over there think; how the differences in their culture and way of thinking has come about through the historical differences in opportunity. All people have a great deal of good in them. It's just that we are afraid of differences and think we can't, shouldn't or won't benefit from the good expressed because they differ from our accepted customs.

There were 16 members of our delegation, 12 registered land surveyors and 5 wives. If you have trouble with your math that's because one of the wives is a registered land surveyor. Our mission was to get acquainted with land surveyors, learn about their methods and practices, assist or be assisted in any manner we found to be of mutual benefit. We were the first delegation of Land Surveyors to visit the Soviet Union, and because we feel we have been blessed with the opportunity to pursue a profession that has provided us with sufficient material necessities to give our families a comfortable experience and provide a needed service for our communities in a satisfactory and equitable manner we want to share our experience with anyone who would benefit.

We met lots of people on the streets, in shops, the surveyors, the survey school instructors and their families. Communication was a real problem and yet I was able to communicate more than I expected with people who spoke no English who I just happened to have an opportunity to meet like people on the plane.

I felt very safe and comfortable on the streets of the cities at all times. I think it would have been different say now that it's cold and harvest time is over and there is a shortage of food, but more than here I feel people will try to help each other out. The natural elements would now give me some trouble but I loved the country side in the fall in Georgia. The houses and general upkeep on the places in the country weren't too great, but our guide told us that most of these were summer homes and in winter the roads are closed and the people all move to the city for warmth and to share the food supply.

They have neat little cars and lots of them on wide modern streets in the cities. The streets are narrow in the country and not too well kept up. There was lots of traffic driving like mad. We attended performances of the Russian Cossack dancers in Leningrad and the Georgian Sword dancers in Tbilisi. The dancing is great and everyone seems to enjoy and be good dancers. The buildings in the cities are several stories even 5 or 6 also not too well kept, but there is no trash just not clean. We learned that a lot of the cities are heated by steam plants where

they burn trash. The entire city is heated by these steam plants. In the apartment in Tbilisi there were no elevators and the apartment was on the third floor. There was another floor above. The furnishings were adequate but nothing fancy. I guess it was a little old fashioned, but we enjoyed them playing their piano, we all sang and I was more caught up in what we were doing than in the things around us.

The subways we rode in Leningrad and Moscow were excellent. The different stations were truly beautiful and I got quite a kick out of riding the escalator over 300 feet long; they went extremely fast; it was almost as much fun as a carnival. There were lots of busses and street cars and I felt strongly their air line is geared to provide for mass transportation rather than luxury, or even comfort.

We were told the problem with the food shortage is there are no facilities to store the crops they grew and are harvesting. Yet they have spent a great deal of time, labor and material restoring the castles, museums and churches. The castles and museums are full of art work and things the Czars collected, now available for everyone to see and enjoy. They also have lots and lots of war memorials to WW II heroes where veterans gather on holidays and newly weds visit on their wedding day. We saw several weddings. They have marriage parlors where couples are married with all the beautiful gowns and dress you'd see in any American church wedding. The couple then visit the different memorials placing flowers on them. After that there is a reception or celebration very much like most of the receptions I've been to.

I was disappointed that our counterparts were not better informed of our visit, they told us that their government didn't brief them at all. They didn't know what to expect, who we were or what we were doing there, so in each of the three cities we visited we spent the first hour getting to square one. Then we had to convince them that our government didn't send us, we were there because we wanted to be there to learn and share our professional achievements and problems. To establish a basis for co-operation in our field of expertise and professional interest.

Surveyors are an independent lot American and Soviets alike we found. After we got through the preliminaries we had a great time talking about survey practices. At one point one of our counterparts commented he had seen people talk through an interpreter on television but this was the first time he had experienced it himself and it was

quite an experience. We all laughed because we all felt the same way. We were shown their equipment, map making facilities, archives and classrooms where they teach surveying. They have as modern equipment as we have and like surveyors everywhere there is always some equipment you would like to have that you don't. The big difference is ours is an economic choice, Can we afford to purchase new equipment and use it efficiently enough to make it pay for itself?, theirs is the Government doesn't provide them with sufficient equipment to do all they would like or are expected to do.

The Soviets have a million questions about "Private Practice Surveying the first one being "How much can you make?". They have little comprehension of parcelling out for private ownership. It's a new idea to them and they were most interested in learning how it works and what we do. Our biggest problem was lack of time. We could have spent hours sharing experiences. They are most gracious and generous. They have so many wonderful qualities that I hope they can maintain while learning to make their economy more efficient and provide their families with more of the good things this modern world has to offer.

The circus in Moscow is everything you've ever heard about and more. Their horse back riding is superb. When I was a teenager I did some horse vaulting but seeing their riders was something else. Things are not terribly expensive by our standards, but there was an unrest and uncertainty, more in the air than anything specific. People seemed to be questioning and anxious about what to expect. I didn't feel there was much expectation that hard work would make things better. I did feel strongly that there was a great deal of hope that education would make things better and a strong desire for things to be better. To the Soviet People things were expensive. They told us that and expressed concern and IMPATIENCE about the expense.

\* I hope you have enjoyed reading about our trip as much as I have enjoyed writing about it.

*Dear Arnold*

