

AKHBOR: News of Boulder-Dushanbe Sister Cities

**CYBER-CAFÉ'S OFFICIAL PRESENTATION TO DUSHANBE, TAJIKISTAN
FROM THE PEOPLE OF BOULDER, COLORADO
SEPTEMBER 23, 2008**

After years of long distance communications with our sister city, planning, designing, fundraising and two years of construction, on Tuesday, September 23, 2008, Boulder Mayor Shaun McGrath officially presented the Boulder Cyber-Café Friendship Center to Dushanbe Mayor Ubaidulloev. The Boulder Cyber-Café Friendship Center is the reciprocal gift from the people of Boulder, Colorado in exchange for the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse from the people of Dushanbe, Tajikistan.



Amid great fan fare, trumpets sounding, a red carpet, several thousand Dushanbe citizens, US Ambassador Tracey Jacobson, Boulder visitors and various officials, the Boulder Cyber-Café Friendship Center was officially presented to Dushanbe.

Though the building was not quite complete due to various delays the presentation went ahead. The mayors toured the very "western looking", spacious, solar facility. They noted the café area, the library with over 900 English, Tajiki, and Russian books, the dividable conference room space, and the twenty computers. They participated in a live video conference joining with people in Boulder at the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse to celebrate the culmination of almost twenty years of efforts completing these two outstanding cultural exchanges. It was the start of a new and exciting link between our two cities.

The café is currently waiting for its final building inspection and for the city of Dushanbe to choose an operator for the facility. Each day students come to the door asking when they can use the computers. It is not unusual for passers-by to ask about where they can find some solar collectors. Just as the beautiful Teahouse in Boulder is an "oh wow" building here, so too the interesting, spacious, handsome Boulder Cyber-Café Friendship Center is an "oh wow" building in Dushanbe. It is a facility the citizens of Boulder can be proud of. Please go to www.boulder-dushanbe.org for more photographs of the presentation.



CYBER-CAFÉ CONSTRUCTION TEAMS

The building of the cyber-café in Dushanbe by a small sister city organization is a truly remarkable event. Citizens in Boulder were dedicated to the idea of reciprocating the amazing Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse. It took five years of planning, research and community involvement by volunteers to determine what would be an appropriate return gift. It took another five years to fundraise almost a million dollars, design a building and arrange for



Peter Stoller talking to Boulder via Skype from the Cyber-Cafe on September 23rd.

its construction in Dushanbe, a city exactly half way around the world from Boulder. It required dedicated and patient people on both sides of the world to see it erected. BDSC Construction Committee members met almost weekly in Boulder to guide the construction. They were: Peter Stoller, chairperson, David Barrett and Sam Nishek, architects from Barrett Studio, Vern Seiroe, local Teahouse

architect, Jim Gerwin, Joe Stepanek, Scott Raderstorf, Don Mock and Ron West—BDSC board members. On the Tajik side there were regular emails, translation support, cultural advice, city connections, material location, hosting support and networking by Maarouf Muhamedov and Matin Kholmatov. They acted as crucial liaisons with BDSC's local representative Tajik Swiss Project Professionals, the city of Dushanbe, and the contractor Remstroy Services. Many people gave of themselves for this project but especially these team members. Thank you.

SILK ROAD JOURNEYS

September 8 through 25, nineteen tourists (including BDSC members) from Boulder and beyond traveled through Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, eventually arriving in Dushanbe in time for the Presentation Ceremony for the Cyber-Café Friendship Center. The tour was arranged by MIR travel and lead by former Boulder-Dushanbe Sister City (BDSC) board president Mary Axe, and BDSC Webmaster Ron Broome. The City of Dushanbe's International Department at the direction of Mayor Ubaidulloev graciously entertained the group during its stay in Dushanbe. The group was joined for several days by Boulder Mayor Shaun McGrath and his wife Becca Heaton. See page 2 for some highlights and photos of the trip shared by several participants.

GIFT PRESENTED TO DUSHANBE PARENTING PLACE

In Dushanbe, where the per capita GDP is \$335, the unemployment rate is above 12%, about 60% of citizens live at or below the poverty level. The average life expectancy is just over 64 years, and the infant mortality rate is 113 per 1,000 live births.

Early in 2005, local physician Dr. Bob McFarland, who co-founded Boulder's Parenting Place, convened a committee of local citizens, including a physician from Dushanbe now residing in Aurora, Colorado, Dr. Dilrom Asimova, to explore the possibilities of establishing a comparable Parenting Center in Dushanbe.

In November of 2005, Dr. Asimova visited her former hometown and succeeded in locating office space and founded the Dushanbe Parenting Center. Dr. Nazira Khadjaeva serves as the Center's Director; other staff includes an assistant director and two visiting nurses. On the basis of a needs assessment survey, the following goals were adopted: to provide prenatal and postnatal counseling and parenting skills information, to visit pregnant women and new mothers, and to render medical and psychological assistance to families.

To date the results of the Center's efforts have been rewarding. Over 150 mothers and teenagers have received medical treatment, healthy baby counseling, and assistance in coping with stress resulting from lack of employment, family pressures, health dilemmas, and absence of spouses due to labor migration.



Mary Axe presenting donation to the Dushanbe Parenting Center September 22.

Regular reports have been submitted by the Center and indicate its remarkable accomplishments in working to meet the needs of a heretofore underserved population in our sister city.

Although the Parenting Center had to close its doors last winter due to the extremely cold weather, because of the lack of electricity, heating, and water, it has re-opened in one of the poorer areas of Dushanbe. It now occupies several rooms at Polyclinic #9.

In September, the BDSC-sponsored tour group paid a visit to the Parenting Center and was warmly welcomed by its staff. Dr. Khadjaeva presented an overview of the Center's work. A contribution of \$2,000, donated by tour group members to assist with the Center's efforts, was presented to the Center.

To help continue the essential work of this fledgling organization, tax-deductible contributions may be mailed to Dushanbe Parenting, Wells Fargo Bank, 1242 Pearl St., Boulder, CO 80302.

HIGHLIGHTS & REFLECTIONS ON SILK ROAD TOUR

Suzie and Nick Helburn's impressions:

...I think my favorite time (Suzie speaking) was the trip from Samarkand to Dushanbe up and over the (Fan) mountains with an enforced stop at a lovely mountain village (to arrange for a new car for our caravan because one of them had broken down). The spectacular mountain scenery, the evening in Aini



with all of its inconveniences that nevertheless provided some direct experience of life in Tajikistan, the drive over the (Anzob) pass the next morning into Dushanbe with our very skilled driver driving as fast as possible around the myriad of pot holes (I pretended it was like a disorganized roller coaster ride), ending with an enforced

car wash by a lovely 10 year-old boy (using a garden hose) before entering Dushanbe in order to avoid a fine!

Nick's most vivid impression was the bareness of the mountains, hardly a speck of vegetation overlooked by the herds of sheep and goats that we met occasionally on the roads. We loved meeting the Tajik people...

We haven't mentioned all the gorgeous relics of the past. Our favorites were in Bukhara where one could actually imagine the bustling Silk Road trade. You could almost hear and see the traders exchanging silks and spices. ...

Note: Nick was the oldest of the travelers at age 90 years old!



Visit our web site for more photos from the Cyber-Café presentation and the tour along with more information about our organization, projects, programs and activities in Dushanbe.

www.boulder-dushanbe.org

Mary Axe wrote:



- Storks' nests atop a long series of telephone poles that stretched parallel to the highway through the Zerafshan valley.
- Fields of cotton being hand-harvested by stooped-over laborers.
- The sky over Central Asia is mostly cloudless during much of the year, especially summer.

Chan Mortimer wrote:

...The tour included everything from belly dancers and vodka and plov (the national dish of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), and an evening with the US Ambassador to Tajikistan, to history lectures, guided tours of mosques, visits with artisans who worked on the Boulder Teahouse..., and visits to the Tajik Presidential Palace...



Patty Shannon wrote:

I felt the high point for me was "experiencing the admiration and friendship extended to Mary Axe from the various Tajikistan groups. Mary's twenty plus years of tireless and unselfish efforts there has helped create cultural exchanges, foster friendships and understanding of peoples' differences."

Becca Heaton, Boulder Mayor Shaun McGrath's wife, wrote:

Our visit to Dushanbe was definitely a whirlwind. ...It was wonderful to get to see the cyber cafe firsthand and to be there for such an amazing dedication. I still remember arriving and seeing a rainbow of colors with all of the women in their beautiful traditional outfits lining the red carpet up to the cafe. I also enjoyed visiting the teahouses in Dushanbe and seeing elements of them that are present in our beautiful Boulder teahouse. I think we got the best of everything in one building...

The officials were incredibly gracious and took such good care of us. ...



CYBER-CAFÉ TREASURER'S REPORT

The Cyber-Café project has now received over 1,800 donations (including loans backed by the City of Boulder) totaling \$905,900, with another \$1,000 pledged. We have expended \$857,600, leaving us \$50,300 on hand plus pledges. We expect to spend another \$41,000 to finish the building. The estimated \$9,300 remaining will be used to cover unexpected expenses and to complete some of the items on our "wish list." Support from the Boulder community, as well as neighbors and friends throughout the U.S., has been tremendous.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

BDSC's Annual Membership meeting was held November 24 to celebrate the year's accomplishments and to elect 2009 board members.

Mark your calendars for a presentation on "Traveling the Silk Road and the Cyber-Café" March 7, 2009, 1 pm at the Boulder Public Library. Details to follow.

NEW ACTIVITIES

With the completion of the Cyber-Café Boulder-Dushanbe Sister Cities will be developing new goals and activities. Please let us know what you imagine as possibilities. Email newsletter@boulder-dushanbe.org

EMAIL ADDRESSES

Please send us your email address. It is a tremendous financial saving for BDSC to send the newsletter and notices to its community of friends by way of email. The quality is better with color rather than black and white printing on paper and it is faster. Please send your email address to: newsletter@boulder-dushanbe.org. We do not share our addresses with others. Our notices and newsletters are sent 5 to 8 times a year.

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If you received email notice of our newsletter please feel free to pass the newsletter on to others who might be interested. If you are not a current member consider joining our organization.

To receive future newsletters, event notices, invitations, and to support our efforts, send a check for a \$30 basic membership to:

Boulder-Dushanbe Sister Cities - Membership
P.O. Box 4864
Boulder, CO 80306

Please include name, address, phone and email address with all correspondence. Information is kept confidential by BDSC.

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