



Partners in Friendship

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PARTNERS IN FRIENDSHIP TO HOST DELEGATION FROM RUSSIAN NUCLEAR CITY

AIKEN, S.C. -- Partners in Friendship (PIF), the Aiken non-profit organization dedicated to international cultural enrichment and appreciation, announced today that it will work with the City of Aiken and Washington Savannah River Company to host a six-person delegation from the Russian closed nuclear city of Seversk. The delegation's visit will include a Worker Transition workshop sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy under its nuclear weapons nonproliferation program. The City's and PIF's activities are being underwritten by Washington Group International.

PIF President George Custodi explained that the purpose of the delegation's visit is two-fold. "Seversk has a great deal in common with Aiken in that both cities are facing the economic and social challenges associated with the shutdown of nuclear weapons facilities," Custodi said. "Through the DOE sponsored workshop and exposure to our experience here, we hope to be able to help them create new opportunities for the workers being displaced by the closure of their nuclear facilities. But it is also an opportunity for a unique cultural exchange. If the visit goes well, we may want to explore the possibility of including Seversk in Aiken's partner city program." Aiken Mayor Fred Cavanaugh echoed that sentiment and added that "this is yet another opportunity for the City of Aiken to support the Department of Energy in its nonproliferation efforts, while at the same time opening doors to additional international activities for the people of Aiken".

The delegation will include high-ranking officials from Seversk. They are: Vyacheslav Nagovitsyn, Vice Governor of the Tomsk Regional Administration (a position similar to that of South Carolina's Lieutenant Governor); Andrey Nikolaev, Deputy Director for

Staff of the Siberian Group of Chemical Enterprises; Mikhail Murashkin, Vice Mayor of Seversk; Sergey Tochilin, Head of Seversk City Administration; Alexander Ageyev, Director of the Department of Innovations and Entrepreneurship Support within the Seversk City Administration; and Eugenia Valeeva, Senior Lecturer at the Seversk State Technologic Academy. Ms. Valeeva will also act as one of the interpreters for the group.

The visit will take place August 12 – 19.

Seversk is a city of 115,000 people, located in Siberia. It is one of several Russian “closed cities” that were built as sites for the production of nuclear weapons and that were closed to foreign visitors (and sometimes even to Soviet citizens) until after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Its two operating nuclear reactors are scheduled to shut down in approximately 2009, displacing several thousand highly-qualified scientists and engineers. Seversk and Aiken are proposed sites for MOX facilities in Russia and the U.S., respectively, which will be built to dispose of weapons-grade plutonium by converting it to nuclear fuel.

Custodi said that while the DOE sponsored workshop will focus on providing training to the delegation on topics such as economic diversification and technology transfer, Partners in Friendship will be responsible for showing the group what life is like in a small American city.

“Seversk delegation members have signaled an interest in learning about the kinds of services, cultural programs, and educational opportunities that are offered here in Aiken,” Custodi said. “They’re hoping that the interchange will help them in their own development efforts in Seversk, as they look for new economic opportunities. By the same token, we hope our contacts with them will result in ideas and relationships that will be positive for Aiken.”

The schedule of PIF-sponsored activities planned for the group includes social gatherings to meet Aiken-area citizens and leaders, a tour of Aiken’s downtown, visits to local shopping venues, lunch at a training track, a picnic in Hopeland Gardens, and an Augusta Green Jackets baseball game. They will also meet with City and County Councils as well as participate in tours of local government and educational facilities and programs.

Custodi said there are tentative plans for a return visit by an Aiken delegation to Seversk in 2007. “In some ways, Seversk is our Russian twin,” Custodi said. “It’s in our best interest to learn everything we can from them. And we’re honored that they want to learn from us.”

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