CITY OF DE PERE  
Sister Cities Committee  
De Pere, WI 54115

Date: July 12, 2006

Committee Meeting

Meeting called to order at 15:32 by Committee Chair Kathy VanVonderen in the Riverview room at city hall.

Attending: Paul Kegel, Jim Stupka, Jerilyn Schad, Lynn Lee, Fr Seamus Nielson, Tracy Hopkins, Ben Villarruel, Mayor Walsh (Late). Absent: Larry Delo, Bill Patzke, Candy Heidersheid, Christine Fossen-Rades, Ron Baeten.

Kathy brought the group up to date on progress. Megtec in the industrial park produces air quality control systems and sells them in ten different countries. They are interested in discussing our interests, however, the contact had a medical problem and was unable to get together with Kathy prior to the meeting. They sell product in France, England, Russia, China, Shanghai, etc. and have received a number of awards for the devices that they created.

Sister cities that have contacted us are two in the Netherlands and one in Costa Rica stating that they would like to link up with us. The Mayor, Larry, and Kathy met with Ricardo who has contacted the mayor of two other communities in Italy on our behalf Pontassiereve, and Bargo Nuovo. Richardo Paterni has a business Human Capital Consultants that is located on Riverside Drive in a Dr.'s building they seem very well organized on their end in the area outside Florence, Italy. They are involved in trade, it is a scenic area, and technically progressive they currently are working with Prebble High School and have approached our East Side High School in an attempt to work together to solve school problems. The industries are all related to fashion, arts, history; they have a business college. They will send further information to Kathy and would like additional discussions on some interaction. There is a concern that these cities are not official "sister cities" participants.

In looking at other state cities that have sister cities a discussion ensued about what we wanted to know in order to sustain the relationship. Did local government support it, how did they get their funding, is there a 'good will' exchange or was it more based on equal exchanges? The Green Bay mayors' office recently went to Mexico (was it official?) the cities are not on the list, 80% of the Mexican population in Green Bay comes from this area. Additional discussions ensued.

Can we use the idea of the new bridge? Discussions ensued over the green spaces that will be created by the new bridge, name a green space after our first sister? The council representatives have a number of ideas after the last presentation on plans for the bridge concepts.

Mike brought up that the discussions with Richardo in relation to his connections. He was an Italian student who was at UWGB and is trying to get more businesses to trade in Italy. He would like to enhance the exchanges in the Green Bay area from more than schools. Background information appears to show a decent fit but it appears the primary area is more rural than us. Additional
discussions ensued.

Dr. Elmer (Monk) arrives and is introduced with his daughter, introductions around the committee. Kathy took the lead in explaining what we were looking for. Dr. Elmer described what their committee is currently doing, what they have done in the past, and what they have in planning. They were originally linked because of a mutual friend to this city that was in need of a basic medical program in Russia. In 1991 they sent their first delegation to Kurgan, Russia unfortunately one of the delegates had a heart attack and died. This unfortunate circumstance pulled the two communities together and underscored the need for medical care in the region. Appleton also has a sister city in Japan, this is however, more of a cultural exchange by a schoolteacher that had an interest. The Kurgan experience started with multiple facets based on numerous interests of committee members. The group would pay their way to Moscow and be picked up from there by their counterparts and when they come here it worked vice versa they paid to Chicago and were picked up by the committee from there. This has changed because of what is going on with the dollar; generally the Russian group cannot any longer afford the trip to the US. Lawrence University started an exchange of students and professionals at one time. In ‘97 a stockpile of weapons was found just outside the city in Kurgan and a plant is being built there to assist in the remediation of this site. The committee helped to find a ‘back door’ for grants through state department channels in assisting with these clean-up activities.

The committee is currently restructuring, in the past all of the committee's goals revolved around some form of an educational exchange based on activities for all past interactions went over to build a hospital program, creating seed programs especially for domestic abuse, organizing a rotary club, high school programs, project citizen (similar to the web program for American Culture day). This is a two way process in that the members while instructing over there realized that there were some holes in the programs back here in the Fox Valley with respect to the domestic abuse program. Those that developed a work plan for Kurgan cam back and revised the programs here; awareness increased across the board. Economics are still a mystery to the membership and an exchange at this level may require an expert.

Paul asked several questions about the exchanges. Monk stated that generally it was an even exchange with Appleton picking up a larger chunk of the expense usually via grants that allow for these exchanges. What have you received from the interactions? Discussed the high school expectations and broadening of the knowledge for overseas. Fr. Jim asked about the diplomacy and language barriers? Monk stated that, the technical college has increased the numbers of language classes and there are 20 to 30 people from the valley that have offered translation exchanges. He also suggested that Scott Rowland who was with SNC in the early ’90's might have some insights. Question on the executive director position. This position is paid for by donations and from the grants that the committees receive. When Gorbachev came and spoke in the fox valley the committee used that as a fund raising event to assist in paying for the various activities. An executive director may not be necessary from the start it is more an activity driven position, for when there is too much to be accomplished by the members. Kathy asked, what role did the city play? It was more a citizen driven activity but he likes the way our committee is structured with all the players present from the beginning. Chamber of Commerce? Is now forming in Kurgan because of the interest from here. Start with cities and develop models for specific programs (e.g. educational). What is the extent of community involvement? The committee has an identity crisis the best thing to do is get the media involved and have them assist in growing the understanding of the relationship. Visibility is always an issue but by taking the media with you can get a lot of mileage.

Maintaining viability has changed considerably over time. There was an extremely difficult period where the Dr. took his mother on a trip because no one else was interested. The committee must
garner support from the community, get grant money (though there is less available now), and there is a need to revamp the committee from time to time. Phoenix has twelve sisters and depending on choice the governor's office may have some interest. There is specific grants money available for some of the exchanges. Their government may have a vision of how things work but they generally don't understand how our government operates and resolves issues (i.e. Kurgan kept asking when the governor was going to come over). There are lots of grants available through web searches or go to VSAID to see what grants are available at this time. May also want to try foundations (i.e. Macarthur foundation). Economics are generally based on how poor a region is may determine what grant dollars are available. Relationships are key and developed among the participants over time. When selecting a place this could have an impact on participation. The group has engaged eighty-five organizations.

As the Dr. wrapped up, discussions ensued. Kathy suggested refocusing our goals for where we expected more of a potential gain based on the interactions. Jim suggested that because of the restructuring we should look at a more broad relationship. Monk suggested looking at multiple interactions that are of interest to the committee members like business exchanges, looking at grants, to cultural exchanges. Appleton's approach is in revision but it was suggested that we try to get the young people involved to maintain viability and enhance communications between the two cities. Currently there is so much activity it is impossible to track like pen pals, etc.

Next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, July 27 at 4:00. Adjourned 5:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

James O. Stupka III

Assistant Fire Chief