YOUR SISTER CITY STORY

The strong relationship between Archangel and Greater Portland began in World War II (1941-1945). Early in the War, the Soviet Union was under powerful attack by Hitler's army, naval and air forces. At that critical hour, the Allied Powers (including the United States, Great Britain and Canada along with free French and Polish naval forces) began the dangerous Arctic Convoys of merchant ships from America and Britain up and around occupied Norway into the arctic ports of Murmansk and Archangel. These convoys operated throughout the War and bought in urgently needed food, medicine, fuel, ammunition and other military supplies. Most World War II convoys from America formed up in and sailed from Greater Portland's Casco Bay; hundreds of merchant ships and escorting warships were involved and veterans say that it was an amazing sight to behold. In addition, more than 30,000 Mainers worked in the huge South Portland Shipyards during the war; they proudly built more than 200 cargo ships (known as Liberty Ships) for the war effort.

Unfortunately, the Cold War years starting in the 1950's prohibited meaningful progress in friendly relations between our countries for some time. After a U.S. – U.S.S.R. Summit in 1973, Tashkent and Seattle became the first Soviet-American Sister Cities; 4 more pairings were established in 1974, but by 1982 only Tashkent-Seattle survived continued strained governmental relations. Fortunately, citizen diplomacy took over the efforts as Peace and Anti-nuclear War groups began in many American communities; in 1981 Sam Beder started the Portland Maine Peace Committee. In 1983, Professor Earl Molander in Oregon founded the "Ground Zero Pairing Project" that paired up American and Russian cities on the basis of geographic, industrial and historical measures; Greater Portland and Archangel were thus reunited (at least on paper). In late 1983, Professor Molander and citizen groups across America mailed written proposals of sister city linkages to more than 800 Soviet cities; unfortunately very few replies were ever received. Undeterred, citizen groups in the United States pressed on; by late 1987 there were 14 official Soviet-American sister cities. Here in Maine, a group led by Dan Glover sent the first unsolicited telex message to the Mayor of Archangel in the summer of 1988 and Mayor Potyomkin sent a positive reply within 2 weeks ! Westbrook Mayor Spiller led the first Maine citizen diplomats to Archangel in November 1988. It must be noted that in 1990, the City of Waterville, Maine formed a sister city relationship with the City of Kotlas in the Archangel Region; and in 1994 the City of Portsmouth, NH formed a sister city relationship with the City of Severodvinsk in the Archangel Region.

In April 1989, Mayor Potyomkin led an official delegation to Maine where elected officials from eleven Greater Portland cities and towns signed an Agreement to support the new relationship. The original municipalities are **Cape Elizabeth, Cumberland, Falmouth, Freeport, Gorham, Portland, Scarborough, South Portland, Westbrook, Windham, and Yarmouth**. Since 1989, 3 additional towns have joined: **Gray, Long Island and New Gloucester**. Between 1988 and today, hundreds of people have traveled between our communities and countless projects and relationships have resulted.

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